

MEETING OF THE PARLIAMENT

Wednesday 7 May 2008

Session 3

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Scottish Parliament

Wednesday 7 May 2008

[THE PRESIDING OFFICER *opened the meeting at 14:30*]

Time for Reflection

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): Good afternoon. The first item of business this afternoon is time for reflection. Our time for reflection leader today is Amanullah De Soudy from the centre for the study of Islam at the University of Glasgow.

Amanullah De Soudy (Centre for the Study of Islam, University of Glasgow): Ladies and gentlemen, Presiding Officer, good afternoon. You may be expecting someone who comes from an ancient divinity school in the west of Scotland to give you a convoluted theological inquiry. Do not worry, I have no intention of doing that, not least because I have arrived here not from the school of divinity at the University of Glasgow, but from Edinburgh's Craiglockhart tennis centre, where I am officiating as a line umpire at a professional tennis tournament. I wonder if it is possible to mix my passion for theology and tennis. Love-15.

Love is the language of theology, faith and practice but, at times, it is lost in the sea of our own delusions. As a Scot who happens to be Muslim, I grew up thinking about what it meant for me to be a Muslim in Scotland. At times, I was stuck between Scottish society and the culture that my parents brought from Pakistan in the 1950s. It was inevitable that those in that position would have an identity crisis. Many tried in vain to create an identity, but the label "Scottish Muslim" truly confused me, for there has to be a Scottish Islam for there to be a Scottish Muslim.

The Scottish Muslim label is stuck between the Pakistani Islam that the first generation brought with them and the medieval Islamic utopia of the golden age that many preach. I found myself unable to accept any of those. I strived for my faith to be complemented by Scottish society and for that to be accepted and, most importantly, criticised by those around me—warts and all, beyond political correctness—for it is only through reflection with the other that our own identities are strengthened.

Love is a great vehicle to shape this. For me, love is the essence of the Qur'an—a text that, for me, is perfectly ambiguous, with its many shades of black, white and grey. It is a scripture that can quite easily support the actions of those who wish to promote love and those who wish to promote

war. After all, it is a text and every reader has their own way of interpreting that text.

Love is a term open to multiple interpretations. Love brings with it its own challenges that we must all consider. The famous 20th century Urdu poet, Faiz Ahmed Faiz, who lived in Pakistan and was from the same city as my parents—Sialkot in the Punjab—was what I would consider a progressive Muslim. Seeking the beautiful in Islam through a critical inquiry into its ugliness, Faiz offers us all some food for thought on love:

"The self of a human being, despite all its loves, troubles, joys and pains, is a tiny, limited and humble thing."

Faiz's most famous poem has changed my outlook on life. It is titled "Mujh Sey Pehli Si Mohabbat Meray Mehboob Na Mang", which translates as "Don't ask me for that love I once gave you, my beloved". He weaves love between the harsh realities of war, hatred and self-interest. He says that, when one realises harsh realities, one is unable to return to the utopia of love or absolute ideals and that love cannot prosper in isolation from all that surrounds it.

So it is my heartfelt prayer that we are all led in our duties as theologians or as politicians in a realistic love, considering the realities and rationalities, weaving our Scottish tartan with its diverse shades of black, white and grey. Only then will our beloved Scotland win—game, set and match.

Thank you.

Free Personal Care

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is a statement by the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing, Nicola Sturgeon, on free personal care.

14:34

The Deputy First Minister and Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing (Nicola Sturgeon): I wish to outline the Scottish Government's response to the independent funding review of free personal care, which was published last week. I will also update members on the positive discussions that we and local government have had to address key aspects of the policy. Those discussions have been taken forward in the spirit of joint accountability, in line with the principles of our concordat. I take this opportunity to thank Lord Sutherland and the other members of his independent group for their substantial and considered report.

We commissioned the review to provide greater clarity on long-standing concerns about the funding of the policy. We asked the review also to examine the United Kingdom Government's decision to withdraw attendance allowance from residents of care homes in Scotland.

The report confirms that the free personal care policy has widespread support and is delivering real benefits to thousands of our most vulnerable older people. It commends local government and delivery agencies for their work in achieving those outcomes.

However, the report confirms the concerns that we and local government have raised about the clarity and funding of the policy. It also provides us with a frank analysis of the longer-term challenges that we face from Scotland's changing demographics. In light of those findings, the report delivers a 12-point action plan, recommending key areas for action in the short, medium and long term. I have today written formally to Lord Sutherland, confirming that the Scottish Government accepts all 12 of his recommendations. They sit alongside the work that we and local government have been taking forward together.

The Government has already uprated the fixed-rate allowances to older people in care homes, in line with inflation, from 1 April, which is the first increase since the policy was introduced. There will be further inflationary increases in the next two years.

We have agreed the need to undertake specific action to improve information systems at national and local levels to ensure greater transparency in

future costs associated with the policy. We will renew our efforts to improve public information and understanding of the policy. We will clarify the legislation and guidance on cross-boundary placements. With the Convention of Scottish Local Authorities, we are looking for a way to ensure an effective performance framework for long-term care services for older people within the single outcome agreement approach.

We have agreed the need for a wider set of joint work streams to review demographic pressures and other practical issues that impact on the current and future demands and costs of care. That work needs to start now, ahead of the next five-year review, as recommended by Lord Sutherland.

Lord Sutherland confirms that a significant element of the difficulties that have affected the policy in recent years arises from a shortfall in funding. Following dialogue with local government, I am delighted to confirm today that, in line with Lord Sutherland's recommendations, the Scottish Government will provide additional funding of £40 million to local authorities from 2009-10 to stabilise the policy. We and local government agree the need to ensure that the additional funding will deliver improved outcomes for vulnerable older people.

We have been working with COSLA to consider those aspects of the policy that have lacked clarity and to address practical issues, in particular eligibility criteria, waiting times and food preparation. Lord Sutherland concludes that those issues have, to a degree, overshadowed the success of the policy and undermined its operation.

We accept that the legislation is not clear on the matter of charging for food preparation. Initial Scottish Executive guidance was wrong, and revised guidance failed to clarify the issue. Since 2002, a number of councils have decided to remove charges. However, eight councils currently still charge. We and local government support the need to address the issue, and I confirm that the Government will introduce legislation to clarify the matter. The effect of that legislation will be that councils will not be entitled to charge for food preparation, which will mean that people who are assessed as requiring, for example, assistance with the preparation or reheating of meals or assistance with eating will not be charged. We would expect the policies of the eight councils that currently charge to change when that legislation takes effect.

Lord Sutherland states that for those people who are assessed as needing free personal and nursing care, there should be a clear

"entitlement ... analogous with the NHS".

He recognises that, as in the national health service, local authorities need to be able to manage the delivery of services to target those most in need, and practical issues of capacity and personal choice do not allow for waiting for services to be eradicated entirely.

Lord Sutherland notes that, in the vast majority of cases, people with significant assessed needs currently receive care services in line with those needs without undue complication or delay. However, current difficulties of interpretation and variability have emphasised the need for more clarity and consistency in what people can expect.

Lord Sutherland suggests that access to care services should be supported with a standardised approach to assessment and delivery of services, with common processes and waiting times. Together with local government, we accept the need to provide a more open and transparent model that explains to service users how access to free personal and nursing care will be managed. People who need help should have their needs determined through a care needs assessment co-ordinated by professional social work staff. Decisions about the level of care that they receive and how quickly they receive it should be based on the outcome of that assessment.

Following earlier discussions, and taking on board the conclusions in the Sutherland report, our shared aim is to seek the establishment of a common eligibility framework that categorises the needs of older people and is applied by all local authorities. In support of that approach, we will together accelerate the comprehensive implementation across all councils and their NHS partners of the single shared assessment model to assist consistent and co-ordinated needs assessments.

Taking on board the practical considerations that are set out in the detail of the Sutherland report, we, together with local authorities, will look to establish a common commitment across all councils to deliver services within a standard maximum waiting time for those clients who are assessed as having immediate or urgent care needs. I should emphasise that the standard will be a maximum limit. For people with priority needs, local authorities will continue to arrange and deliver services and equipment as a matter of urgency, usually within days.

As in the NHS, there should be active monitoring of the needs of people who are assessed as not having immediate needs and, where practical and appropriate, there should be preventive measures to reduce the risk of their needs becoming more critical.

We will use the time over the coming months to further refine and clarify the detail of those

arrangements to ensure that they deliver consistent and genuine improvements in the outcomes for older people.

I would like to address directly the issue of attendance allowance. The report states clearly that the UK Government should not have withdrawn the attendance allowance resources that were previously paid to residents in care homes, which are currently valued at £30 million a year. Attendance allowance is a tax-free, social security benefit that is paid to UK citizens over the age of 65 who need help with personal care or who need a lot of looking after.

Prior to the implementation of free personal and nursing care, people who funded their own care in a care home could apply for and receive attendance allowance. However, the UK Government determined that personal care payments were a contribution to the residents' accommodation costs and that attendance allowance payments should therefore be withdrawn. The value of the payments withdrawn from eligible residents in 2002 was £23 million and the current value is more than £30 million a year.

The previous Scottish Executive reset the levels of personal care payments for care home residents to compensate for the loss of attendance allowance, to ensure that residents did not lose out. That added significantly to the overall costs of the policy. If the savings from the withdrawal of attendance allowance had been transferred to the Scottish budget, the increase in costs would have been offset. However, as we know, that did not happen and the savings were retained by the Treasury.

The UK Government's decision—a reaction to a policy of which it did not approve—was deeply unjust and wrong. The current funding gap that Lord Sutherland has identified would be significantly less if those additional resources were available to invest in care services in Scotland. As well as being unjust, the decision is anomalous. People in Scotland who live in their own homes and receive public support for their personal care needs can still receive attendance allowance, as can older people in care homes in England who receive free nursing care.

It is therefore no surprise that the Sutherland review concludes that there is a clear inequity, as entitlement to attendance allowance has been stopped for residents of Scotland while it continues for residents of other parts of the UK, and that the Scottish budget is bearing the costs. That is not a new opinion from Lord Sutherland. He raised similar concerns in his evidence to the Health Committee's care inquiry, which published its report in 2006.

Henry McLeish, the First Minister when free personal and nursing care was introduced, supports Lord Sutherland's view and has said that the Westminster Government should take a "much more mature view". I am pleased that members of the Scottish Parliament and spokespersons from other parties have expressed similar views.

The Scottish Government is determined that we should seek the reinstatement of the funding and correct the inequity that has been identified by Lord Sutherland. The Scottish Government has therefore asked for the issue to be discussed as a priority at the next meeting of the joint ministerial committee.

I believe that our existing strong case will be further strengthened if we can demonstrate a co-ordinated and consistent response from this Parliament, so I will seek an early opportunity for the Parliament to express its view formally on this important matter.

As the Sutherland report makes clear, the issue of attendance allowance is not just a matter of equity. Being able to consider all the funding streams available to support the long-term care needs of our most vulnerable older people—including local authority funding, health spending and UK benefits—is vital to how we prepare for the demographic challenges that we face. I wholeheartedly agree with Lord Sutherland's vision that we need to take a more holistic approach to meeting future demand for care.

Lord Sutherland's report and recommendations set us all significant challenges, both to stabilise the current policy determined by the Parliament and to be ambitious and bold in how we prepare for the future needs of our ageing population. I reassure members and the people of Scotland of the Government's commitment to address those challenges and to secure the future of free personal and nursing care.

The Presiding Officer: The cabinet secretary will now take questions on the issues raised in her statement. We have around 30 minutes for questions, after which we will move to the next item of business.

Margaret Curran (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab): I thank the cabinet secretary for the early circulation of her statement and I associate the Labour Party with the thanks to Lord Sutherland for his work.

As the Sutherland report recognises, the introduction of free personal care by the previous Executive was groundbreaking and represented a key change to the long-term care of the elderly in Scotland. I hope that the cabinet secretary can recognise the points that Lord Sutherland makes in his report. He states:

"The policy was implemented with expedition, and on the whole the process has gone well ... A number of factors contributed to this ... the resources of the relevant areas of government were marshalled very effectively."

Lord Sutherland has produced a striking report that presents us all with a challenge. I refer in particular to his clarion call that we must recognise the profound issue of demographic change. Many issues will be raised in relation to that in the debate next week, which I look forward to.

In the meantime, I ask the following specific questions. How will local authorities deal with financial pressures that they may face in the current financial year? Out of which budget will the £40 million be found? Is the establishment of a common commitment, which I take to mean a minimum standard of service that we can expect throughout Scotland, consistent with the concordat and with recent statements by ministers about the need for minimum standards of service more generally throughout Scotland? Finally, will the cabinet secretary guarantee that addressing the financial issues that are raised in the Sutherland report will not mean any reduction in service for the care of people living in their own homes, nor any price increases for that care?

Nicola Sturgeon: I can shoot down that particular piece of scaremongering straight away. It is absolutely not the case that what I have announced today will have the effect that Margaret Curran suggests.

I have accepted all of Lord Sutherland's recommendations and I also accept all of his comments in the report. The introduction of free personal and nursing care did great credit to the Parliament and all parties in the Parliament. It is now incumbent on members to work together to ensure that we secure the policy for the long term, which is exactly what my statement seeks to make happen.

Margaret Curran could have been a wee bit gracious and found it within herself to welcome the additional £40 million that we have committed to secure the future of the policy.

Margaret Curran asked about this year. As I said in my statement, we have agreed with COSLA that the investment of the additional resource must deliver improved outcomes for older people. Indeed, that is something that Lord Sutherland made clear in his report. It is important that we take the time this year to work with COSLA, for example to clarify the legislation with regard to food preparation, and to develop the common assessment criteria and the common eligibility framework, which will ensure that that money delivers improved outcomes for older people.

All that I have said today has been worked up in partnership with COSLA—such is the way in which

the Government now works with its local authority friends and colleagues. My statement was entirely consistent with the spirit and letter of the concordat. I am delighted that Margaret Curran sets such store by the concordat—that is, perhaps, another of the many U-turns that we have heard from the Labour Party this week.

It is important to acknowledge that Lord Sutherland has said that the policy of free personal care is delivering well for more than 50,000 older people in Scotland but that there are issues to do with inconsistency and variability. It is also important that we develop consistent standards that will apply across Scotland. I am confident that taking forward the work of Lord Sutherland will enable us to do so.

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I thank the cabinet secretary for the advance copy of her statement. Scottish Conservatives welcome the on-going discussions on attendance allowance, the recognition of the need for further clarity on eligibility and the funding of the policy, and the commitment to address the funding shortfall of £40 million.

The review is mainly about funding. Will the Government now ensure that councils pay the same amount to the independent and voluntary sector as they pay when someone is placed in a council-run home, given that the same quality standards apply?

Secondly, with so much confusion over the policy, how does the Government intend to improve public information and understanding, as recommended by Lord Sutherland?

Thirdly, in looking at the future provision, will the Government revisit the issue of integrated care homes? When the Community Care and Health (Scotland) Act 2002 was passed, the Health and Community Care Committee understood that the issue would be revisited, to ensure that elderly people did not have to move from residential to nursing care when their condition deteriorated.

Finally, what is being done to increase the uptake of direct payments for care?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Mary Scanlon for her welcome for the significant announcements that we have made today, and thank her for what I assume was an expression of the Scottish Conservatives' support for the Government's attempts to get back the £30 million that was wrongly taken out of the Scottish budget in respect of attendance allowance.

On the point about the independent and voluntary sector and the council sector, positive work is being done between COSLA and the independent care home sector to ensure that the issues that have been problematic for some time

are resolved. The work on consistent quality standards across all care homes is extremely important and I welcome the progress that is being made in that respect.

Mary Scanlon is right to ask about improving public information. One issue for which we are all perhaps to some degree to blame is that, in being—rightly—excited about the free personal care policy, which is in the vanguard and is leading edge, we did not take enough time to explain to the public the contract that Lord Sutherland's original report recommended between the state and the individual and the division between personal nursing costs and what he called hotel costs. That information now needs to be provided and we will look to work with COSLA to find the best ways of doing that.

We are seeing progress on integrated care homes, which will be an important strand of work on the future provision of care. Lord Sutherland's report makes helpful points about the need for the integrated model of care.

The Minister for Public Health is leading work on direct payments, which have a big and a potentially much bigger role to play in allowing people to have the dignity and independence in their later years that they all deserve and which most of them want.

Ross Finnie (West of Scotland) (LD): I, too, thank the cabinet secretary for an advance copy of her statement. On the Liberal Democrats' behalf, I welcome her immediate acceptance of all 12 of Sutherland's recommendations and her announcements on funding and other matters, which we must all applaud.

There is no question but that the cabinet secretary has the Liberal Democrats' wholehearted support on attendance allowance. The matter goes a little further. An interesting point of principle is that, when a policy and its funding were decided before the Parliament was established, and when the Parliament has subsequently decided by a majority that a better way of fulfilling that policy exists, there should be no presumption that the funding stream should not be adjusted to take account of the Parliament's will, given that the Westminster Parliament approved this Parliament's establishment. A matter of principle—I see that the cabinet secretary with responsibility for broader matters is sitting on the Cabinet Secretary for Health and Wellbeing's left—and not just the attendance allowance question needs to be decided.

Asking questions is always difficult after my preceding colleagues have asked seven questions, but never mind. The cabinet secretary mentioned discussing with COSLA what the report refers to as managing expectations. I am not

wholly persuaded that that matter is simply for COSLA and local government. Free personal care is seen as a public policy and a Government policy, so I say with respect that improving understanding of it rests more with the cabinet secretary's good self and the Government than with a conversation with local government, although that might help.

Having an effective performance framework is important. We understand that the Government has introduced a new means of dealing with that, but we are a year on, and it is becoming important to understand better the timeframe in which standards will become available, so that Parliament can measure performance in accordance with the framework that will be established.

I have no problem in being gracious about the additional £40 million, but I am still interested to know where it is coming from.

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Ross Finnie for his graciousness in all his questions. Unsurprisingly, I agree whole-heartedly with his comments about attendance allowance. I know that this is probably not the day on which Labour members want to hear talk about Westminster contradicting Scotland but, nevertheless, needs must.

An important specific point is that, in effect, the attendance allowance decision robbed the Scottish budget of £30 million and has had consequences for the policy's implementation, but we must also resolve the bigger issue of principle, to ensure that the same thing does not happen with future policies. I am sure that we can all think of a few future policies that might fall into that category. It is unacceptable for Westminster to seek to undermine and frustrate the exercise of the Parliament's devolved powers on matters on which it wants to act. Westminster tried to do that with attendance allowance. We must rectify that situation and establish the principle that such an approach is unacceptable.

On public expectations, I apologise if I gave the wrong impression. I did not in any way try to suggest that managing expectations is a matter for COSLA. I think that I said that the Government would have to work with COSLA to address that matter. I agree with Ross Finnie. I absolutely accept that there is a responsibility—in fact, I would go as far as to say the lead responsibility—on the Scottish Government's shoulders to ensure that the public policy on free personal care is properly understood and explained. We will certainly discharge our responsibility, but it is clear that COSLA also has an important role and interest in free personal care. It is therefore important that we work together in a spirit of partnership on all the aspects that I mentioned in my statement.

Ross Finnie mentioned the performance framework. In my statement, I said that we require to develop an effective performance framework in line with the framework of single outcome agreements. Work on that is progressing extremely well. It is not only the Government that thinks that we now have a much better focus on outcomes rather than on inputs—that view is shared widely across local government. Such a focus has transformed the relationship between local and central Government for the better, and I hope that all members welcome that.

I thank Ross Finnie for welcoming the £40 million that I mentioned. Obviously, that money must come from within the resources that are available to the Scottish Government—I see the Cabinet Secretary for Finance and Sustainable Growth listening carefully to everything that I am saying. Clearly, when we publish our budget for the next financial year, it will be open to full scrutiny by the Parliament. Today, what is important is that we are making a clear commitment to ensure that the resources that Lord Sutherland has said are required are provided to stabilise the policy.

The Presiding Officer: We come to questions from back benchers. You know the form: brevity is beautiful in both questions and answers.

Michael Matheson (Falkirk West) (SNP): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement. In particular, I welcome the Government's commitment to ensuring that the policy is adequately funded through the provision of an additional £40 million.

Given that there appears to be growing cross-party consensus that the Westminster Government has acted in an unjust and spiteful way in holding back £30 million of attendance allowance money that belongs to Scotland, will the cabinet secretary advise members on the procedure that will be employed as the issue is taken through the joint ministerial committee? Will she ensure that, where possible, the Parliament is kept informed of the progress that is made in taking Scotland's case to London?

Nicola Sturgeon: I think that widespread consensus now exists that the Westminster Government's decision was wrong and should now be put right. As I have said, we have formally intimated to the United Kingdom Government that we want the issue that Michael Matheson raises to be on the agenda for the next joint ministerial committee meeting. The fact that that committee will start to meet again after such a long gap is a positive step. It is important in the first instance that we have such discussions and that we make clear to the UK Government our determination that the money in question be returned to the Scottish budget. I also said in my statement that it is

important to have the Parliament speaking with one voice, which is why there will be an early opportunity for the Parliament to do that and for members to debate the other issues that I have raised. I believe that if the Parliament is united and shows determination, we can and should prevail.

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): The Labour Party welcomes much of the statement. We were in favour of the policy, which was put through by the whole Parliament. It is clear that the funding that has been announced is welcome. However, my colleague Margaret Curran asked a question to which we still have not received an answer. What will we do in the very short term, over the course of the next year? If every time that Labour spokesmen ask questions the cabinet secretary attacks them personally, says that they are scaremongering and then does not answer their questions, we will not be able to get constructive relationships on matters that the cabinet secretary rightly said should be consensual. I would like an answer to my colleague's question.

My question is on a slightly different issue: the targets for assessments and action to address needs. In her statement, the cabinet secretary referred to people with urgent and priority needs, whereas local authorities usually refer to people with critical and substantial needs. Whichever words are used, we are talking about the top two categories of need. How does what the cabinet secretary said square with the Government's decision, which she continually states, that the six-week target on blocked beds will be met, if only those with substantial and critical needs or urgent and priority needs will have their needs met within the six weeks that Lord Sutherland suggested? To achieve uniformity, what will happen to those targets if the needs of other groups are not met within that time period?

Nicola Sturgeon: That is not quite what I said, and it is a point on which it is important that I make my position clear, so I will come back to it.

I hope that we can have a constructive relationship on this issue, but if the Labour Party spokesperson greets what everybody agrees is good news by impugning some malign motive or hidden agenda in it, Richard Simpson should not be surprised if there is a bit of attack in return. Sometimes, the best thing to do is what he has just done—be gracious and accept that what we have announced today is good news for older people throughout Scotland.

I remind Richard Simpson that council budgets have increased for this financial year by more than the rate of inflation. Therefore, the budgets that councils have available to them for free personal care have already increased this year. We have also, for the first time, increased the payments for

free personal and nursing care in line with inflation. It is not at all fair to suggest that the Government is doing nothing this year.

Importantly—the point was made strongly by Lord Sutherland—we have agreed with COSLA that substantial additional investment of the kind to which we have committed ourselves today must be tied to real improvements in outcomes for older people. We must take the time to work through the detail so that there is clarity on food preparation, and we must work through and get right the detail on the common assessment criteria, the common eligibility framework and the standard maximum waiting times. We are working closely with COSLA and we are making fantastic progress in a spirit of partnership. That is what makes me confident that, when we invest that money in the next financial year, it will deliver real improvements for older people.

Lord Sutherland is very clear on the issue of entitlement, and members should recall that I have accepted all his recommendations. When someone is assessed as needing free personal care, they have an entitlement to that care. However, as in the NHS, the level of care to which they are entitled and the length of time that it might be acceptable for them to wait for it will be driven by the assessment of their need. Again, as in the NHS, it is important that councils are able to manage their resources to ensure that those who are in greatest need have their needs catered for as quickly as possible.

At the moment, there is no maximum waiting time for those with urgent care needs. We are suggesting the establishment of a maximum waiting time for those people. Currently, if somebody is deemed to have low-level care needs, because of the way in which the eligibility criteria work in some councils, those people are effectively filtered out of the system altogether—they are not even recorded or monitored. We are saying that, even if somebody does not have immediate care needs, they must be monitored to ensure that their situation does not fall off the radar screen. I think that that is substantial progress, and I hope that everybody welcomes it.

Christine Grahame (South of Scotland) (SNP): I welcome the commitment to clarification on cross-border payments, which is an issue that is obviously of concern to people in the Scottish Borders.

Scottish Borders Council is one of the eight local authorities that continues to charge for food preparation. Does the cabinet secretary agree that, while we await the legislation that will clarify the situation, those who are currently being charged may well have a legal remedy to recoup those payments? Does she also agree that, at the very least, until the new legislation is in place,

Scottish Borders Council and the other seven councils that currently charge for food preparation should act according to the spirit, if not the letter, of the current law?

Nicola Sturgeon: As I have acknowledged openly and frankly today, I think that the legislation is unclear, which has led to local authorities taking their own legal advice on the matter. Some local authorities have decided to stop charging; others have made a different decision. It is not for me to advise individuals on what course of action they should take. My responsibility for the future is to ensure that that lack of clarity is rectified. Going back to a point that Ross Finnie made, I think that the responsibility for that lies with the Government. It is for us to ensure that, from here on in, the legislation is clear, and that is what we intend to do. We want to put it beyond any doubt that food preparation is something for which individuals should not be charged.

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I welcome the cabinet secretary's statement, but does she agree that the main challenge facing the future of the policy is Scotland's changing demographics? Does she agree that the main reason why the original costings were an underestimate is that the 2006 census projected far more old old people—that is, people living over the age of 90—than the previous census, on which the care development group report was based?

Although I agree with the cabinet secretary on the specific attendance allowance issue, does she agree that perhaps the most important recommendation in Lord Sutherland's report relates to the wider review of all the costs of long-term care? Would it not be sensible to set the attendance allowance issue within that wider context?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Malcolm Chisholm for his constructive comments. I agree that changing demographics are in large part responsible for the care estimates being off-beam. I deliberately did not imply that there was any fault on the part of the care development group or the previous Administration for that, or seek to blame them. The important thing is that we all now work together to put the matter right.

Although the return of the attendance allowance moneys is very important in the context of Lord Sutherland's recommendation on how to "stabilise the policy" in the short term, I agree with Malcolm Chisholm that Lord Sutherland's most radical and important recommendations are those that deal with the longer term. Lord Sutherland rightly states that we must start planning now for our changing demographics. He also rightly points out that such planning must be about much more than just free personal and nursing care. The money that we

spend on free personal and nursing care amounts to only 10 per cent of the total that we spend on services for older people. Regardless of the policy on free personal care, planning for future demographics is absolutely critical. As I said in my statement, we intend to get on with that straight away.

David McLetchie (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con): The cabinet secretary noted that eight councils in Scotland are still charging for assistance with meal preparation. Is she aware that COSLA has been stalling on that issue for the past five years? COSLA has consistently refused to seek a legal opinion on behalf of all its member councils on the interpretation of the legislation, notwithstanding the fact that it was well aware that several councils have legal opinions to the effect that such charges are illegal. Is she aware that local authorities such as the City of Edinburgh Council, West Lothian Council and Western Isles Council have not only ended the practice of charging for meals preparation but, to their credit, refunded people who were wrongly charged for that element of personal care? Is it not quite wrong that older people living in eight areas of Scotland are still charged for such services when the charges have been pronounced illegal and have been stopped in the rest of the country? I echo Christine Grahame by asking that the minister insist that the practice cease forthwith and that she ensure that those who have been wrongly charged by councils since the introduction of the policy are refunded, as is only their due and their right.

Nicola Sturgeon: My statement sent out a message about what I think about charging for food preparation. However, I am not interested in playing the blame game; I want to fix the problems with the policy so that we secure it for the long term. As I said to Christine Grahame, the lack of clarity in the legislation and the guidance has led to different councils reaching different positions based on differing pieces of legal advice. In fairness, COSLA did not frame the legislation or write the guidance, which was the responsibility of the Government. I accept that the legislation and the guidance are unclear; we will clarify them. In future, we will not have a situation—which I accept is wrong—in which people in some parts of the country pay for food preparation while people in other parts of the country do not.

Jamie Stone (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD): Further to Malcolm Chisholm's point about Scotland's changing demographics, it will come as no surprise to the cabinet secretary that my mind goes instantly to the Highland Council area, parts of which have a very rapidly aging population—arguably, the graph is steeper in the Highlands than in other parts of Scotland. Does the cabinet secretary recognise that problem? Will she outline what mechanisms

the Scottish Government will adopt to deal with it? How will the Government fine-tune the settlement within the £40 million envelope, which we all welcome, or within whatever funding streams might come on tap? If the issue is not treated at that slightly smaller level, it could present a severe problem at the most local level.

Nicola Sturgeon: As Jamie Stone will know, part of the Sutherland review's remit was to look at not just the overall level of resources available to local government but their distribution among local authorities. In his report, Lord Sutherland recognises that the distribution of resources to local authorities is under review and argues that the resources for free personal care should be included in that overall picture.

I accept the premise of the points that Jamie Stone makes. Not only must we deal with the changing demographics in the country as a whole, but we must be sensitive to the differing pictures within Scotland. There are particular issues in remote and rural Scotland, as in many other areas. I assure the member that we will be mindful of that as we take forward work on free personal care for the long term.

The Presiding Officer: Four members have indicated that they have questions to ask, but less than four minutes remain for them to do so.

Nigel Don (North East Scotland) (SNP): My question is about the assessment of people's needs. The cabinet secretary was right to say that people should have their needs determined professionally. I cannot expect her to know how fast that is done in every local authority in Scotland, but my experience is that sometimes it is not done very fast. Does she agree that the lead time for assessment is crucial to the process? Will she ensure that councils have enough staff to enable them to take that first step?

Nicola Sturgeon: I agree that it is vital that older people with care needs are assessed as quickly as is possible and practicable. That is one reason why is important to get consistency and common procedures in place in all councils. We are committed to accelerating the move towards a single shared assessment. In that process, we will focus on exactly the kind of issues that Nigel Don has raised.

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): I apologise to the cabinet secretary for my late arrival two minutes into her statement. I, too, compliment her graciously on the statement.

One major concern of all our constituents is that the service, by its nature, is demand led. That creates challenges for all local authorities within the Government's funding settlement. Could it lead to rationing? If so, how will the cabinet secretary ensure that the needs of those who require free

personal care do not go unmet, given that local authority funding is finite and demand may outstrip finance? As Ross Finnie said, when the money runs out, where will additional money come from?

Nicola Sturgeon: I thank Helen Eadie for her apology; I understand totally the reasons for her late arrival. However, I suggest gently to her that it would have been good if she had used the few minutes before she arrived in the chamber to read the Sutherland report, because it is intended to address precisely the issue that she raises—how we manage demand for free personal care and ensure that, although the policy is based on an entitlement, people in greatest need have greatest call on resources. We are wrestling with that issue. I assure her that we will continue to progress it through the announcements that I have made today and the work that we are undertaking with COSLA.

I point out to Helen Eadie and other members that Lord Sutherland says that the policy is clearly sustainable. That is an important point that should give us all cause for optimism about its future. I take great heart from Lord Sutherland's statement and know that old people throughout the country and their families will do so, too.

Jackson Carlaw (West of Scotland) (Con): I am not sure whether a statement on the elderly in need of care is an appropriate opportunity for me to welcome back to the chamber the First Minister, Ross Finnie and the Presiding Officer after their recent indispositions, but I do so on behalf of my colleagues.

Future demographics are a cause for some alarm. Does the cabinet secretary agree that whatever is achieved after today must not be interpreted by the public as a general signal that anyone can safely abdicate their responsibility to plan prudently for their old age and, where possible, to have regard to their health as they live their lives? If care is to be fully funded, the boundaries of the state must be understood.

Nicola Sturgeon: The member makes an important point that relates to the issue of public information and education. One of the failures of all of us in explaining the policy was that many people got the impression that, following the introduction of free personal care, all the costs of old age would be met by the state. That was never Lord Sutherland's recommendation or the Parliament's intention. The Parliament intended that personal and nursing care should be funded by the state but that some people, depending on their personal circumstances, would still have to contribute to meeting their hotel or accommodation costs. It is our fault that that point has not been put across as well as it should have been. We all have a responsibility to explain it

better and, in so doing, to make it clear that all of us have a responsibility to plan for our old age.

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): Will the cabinet secretary ensure that the particular needs of old people with Alzheimer's and dementia are taken into consideration when a common eligibility framework is established, so that they can be offered equity in the social and health care systems?

Nicola Sturgeon: I commend Irene Oldfather for her attention to dementia issues; she certainly pursues them with a great deal of attention and interest. I give her an absolute assurance that the needs of that particular group of older people will be very much at the top of our minds as we develop our work.

International Framework

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): The next item of business is a debate on motion S3M-1838, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the international framework.

15:21

The Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture (Linda Fabiani): It is good to have the opportunity today to discuss the Scottish Government's international framework. The debate gives the chamber the opportunity to discuss the principles that underpin the Government's approach to its international activities.

I want to address, right at the start of the debate, the important question of international development policy and the amendment in the name of Malcolm Chisholm. As I discussed with the European and External Relations Committee last week, the Government's international framework is exactly that—the framework from which fall detailed action plans and specific policies. I am pleased to have published the international development policy today, which reflects the commitment made in the framework for an increased international development fund. The policy document is available at the back of the chamber and I look forward to discussing it in detail with the European and External Relations Committee at our forthcoming session. Although I recognise absolutely the sentiment and commitment behind the Labour amendment, I ask that Mr Chisholm consider withdrawing it in the spirit of the framework and the international development policy.

I was happy to discuss the framework and the accompanying draft action plan on European engagement with the European and External Relations Committee on Tuesday last week. It seems there is consensus about much of the work that is undertaken at international level. The committee is due thanks for its work in convening evidence-taking sessions on the Scottish Government's approach to international activities. Those sessions were extremely valuable to us in finalising our strategy.

The sessions that the Government held on our international framework and our China plan were also extremely valuable. I am pleased to announce that the refreshed China plan has been published today. It shows how aspirations can become concrete actions by developing joint opportunities in education, trade, science, tourism and culture. I expect that members have picked up a copy from the back of the chamber. I look forward to discussing the plan with the cross-party

group on China, as I confirmed to my colleague, Gil Paterson, at the European and External Relations Committee last week.

I am clear that the objectives that I have set for the Scottish Government's international activities are tied to the Government economic strategy. The objectives are: to create the conditions for talented people to live, learn, work, visit and remain in Scotland so that Scottish population growth matches the European Union average; to bring a sharp economic growth focus to the promotion of Scotland abroad so that the Scottish gross domestic product growth rate matches that of the United Kingdom by 2011; and to manage Scotland's reputation as a distinctive global identity—an independent-minded and responsible nation at home and abroad that is confident of its place in the world.

Although there is alignment of our resources around the GES targets, our activity has a fresh emphasis. We will develop closer relations on international work between the Scottish Government, Scottish Development International, VisitScotland, EventScotland and creative Scotland. The recent strategic, better-targeted, more business-focused, efficient and cost-effective Scotland week in North America is an early example of that strategy. We are willing to challenge the UK line to ensure that Scotland's voice is heard, while being proactive in using the UK resources that are at our disposal. We will recognise where Scotland's excellence lies and focus on those areas. We are confident about focusing on Scotland's reputation as a nation, not a region.

The pursuit of trade, tourism and inward investment remains at the heart of our work and persists as a reason for having Scottish affairs offices in North America and China. That, in turn, entails positioning Scotland as a great place to live, learn, visit, work and remain in.

The framework document does not seek to list all the international work across the Scottish Government. We agree with the Scots who have told us that Government and the public sector should be agile and fleet of foot. We will monitor and evaluate the activities that we undertake, although we will take a strategic viewpoint and get involved when there is good reason. Activity for its own sake is not productive; the work of Government is to provide the conditions for exchange, not to risk hindering others as they seek to make the civic, Scottish, UK, EU or global partnerships that are the platform for their success.

We will focus Government intervention on areas that will pay dividends, such as the work that I kicked off last week with the consular corps in Scotland. I made a commitment that the Scottish

Government will work with the corps in a structured and professional way—and to our mutual advantage—to ensure effective communication of our aspirations with regard to Scotland's place in the world.

Although our scope for taking part in international affairs is constrained by the current devolution settlement, we have offices in Brussels and officials who work solely on Scottish affairs in the UK embassies in Beijing and Washington. Alongside them, around 80 staff work in offices abroad for Scottish Development International, the arm of Government that promotes international trade and inward investment. However, that still means that fewer than 100 people work professionally for us furth of Scotland.

The key message, therefore, is the need for a flexible pragmatism. Scotland looks to the Scottish Government to provide strategic direction, to be able to identify key points of leverage and to respond swiftly. The framework focuses the actions and policies of the Scottish Government and other public sector players to maximise their impact on the performance of team Scotland. As I have said, last month's Scotland week in North America delivered the most ambitious programme of events around tartan day ever undertaken by Scottish ministers—and at around half the cost of previous years' celebrations.

Adopting a fleet-footed, agile approach does not mean that we will cease to work closely with our existing partners. However, I am convinced that the targeted memorandum of understanding for education purposes that the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning signed last month with the Chinese Ministry of Education delivers mutual benefits more effectively than wide-ranging co-operation agreements. We will continue to work on projects of benefit with regions where we have previously had such agreements. However, we will be led by benefit and opportunity. Under this Government, exchanges between Scotland and Shandong, Victoria, Catalonia and other areas have continued.

A more responsive approach requires the Scottish Government to work in an integrated way across the public sector and to find new, agile ways of reaching out more widely to civic society in order to share information. Of course, the action plans and policies that fall from the international framework will set out our detailed aims and targets for our key policies. However, people with experience have told us repeatedly that, instead of focusing on a multiplicity of targets, we must put our energy into taking a more responsive and coherent approach.

That brings me to the Conservative amendment in the name of Mr Brocklebank. By quoting back to us from our framework document, Mr Brocklebank

and his colleagues seem to have recognised the value of this Government's strategic approach and our commitment to working with all relevant partners to achieve the best for Scotland. I am therefore pleased to accept the amendment.

I am sorry, but I cannot say the same about the Liberal Democrat amendment in the name of Mr Smith. Let me make it plain: this Government for Scotland has a vision and aspirations for our nation that are explicit in their clarity, truthfulness and direction. Scotland expects no less from the Scottish National Party, the First Minister and his Government. No less should be expected from Government in any democracy—I would have thought that liberal-minded politicians of any party would take that as a given. For members to suggest that ministers in this Government would flip-flop around, change their minds on a daily basis and hide things from Scots shows that they have no understanding whatever of the deeply held beliefs in conviction and honesty that are at the heart of this Government.

I ask members not to play that silly Lib Dem game but to keep watch on today's main target—an international framework that we all agree can increase Scotland's competitive edge by supporting the conditions for talented people to live, learn, work, visit and remain in Scotland. I am sure that members will want to feed into the framework and I look forward to hearing from them about how we can work together towards that end.

I move,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of ensuring that Scotland is competitive in an increasingly globalised society; agrees that creating the conditions for talented people to live, learn, visit, work and remain in Scotland is crucial to helping to deliver the goals of growing Scotland's population and economy in a sustainable way, and welcomes the Scottish Government's International Framework as a means to extend, focus and align the actions and policies of the government and public sector partners to these ends.

15:31

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I accept that the debate will focus on the six or so pages of the international framework document but, given that there is a short paragraph on international development at the end of the document, I was surprised that the minister asked me not to move my amendment, which refers to international development. If the Parliament is to make a statement about its international framework or strategy, it is important to make it explicit that work on international development is a crucial part of that.

I cannot disagree with the sentiments in the motion on promoting Scotland and in particular on growing the Scottish economy. However, our

international strategy always had two strands. One strand, of course, was about promoting Scotland and growing our economy; the other strand was about ensuring that we fulfil our obligations to the rest of the world. It would be quite wrong to agree to a motion that does not contain both elements.

We cannot have an international framework that does not encompass international development. For example, it might be good for this country's economy to attract nurses and other health care workers from certain countries in Africa, but that would not be good for those countries. We must consider the issue holistically. I hope that the minister will change her mind in that regard.

I cannot object to what is said in the motion and the framework, but I must express disappointment with the framework, not just because—how shall I put this?—it is not the best Government document in its structure and clarity, but, more fundamental, because its content is extremely thin. I applaud the phrase,

“where we assert excellence there must be substance to those claims”,

but the new international framework is markedly less substantial than the previous international strategy.

Although the Scottish Government's claim that it will extend, align and provide new focus for its actions in the international arena sounds innovative and progressive, its policy contains little that is new. The emphasis on economic growth, for example, was the top priority of the previous international strategy. The statement about the importance of marketing Scotland

“as a great place to live, learn, visit, work, do business and invest”

is an almost-verbatim quotation from the previous strategy.

There is confusion on page 1, where it is suggested that our international activities will contribute to sustainable economic growth by

“Creating the conditions for talented people to live, learn, visit, work and remain in Scotland”,

rather than by promoting Scotland as a good place for talented people to be. The conditions themselves will largely be determined by economic and social policies in Scotland. Elaine Murray will talk about such policies.

The confusion between international activity and wider economic policy is evident when we consider how the framework's success is to be evaluated. Although the key targets of population growth and GDP growth, which are set out at the beginning of the document and referred to in the motion, are useful and important, the international framework fails to set out how we can ascertain

the extent to which the policies that it contains have contributed to those economic objectives.

How the third key objective of

“Managing Scotland’s reputation as a distinctive global identity”

is to be measured and evaluated is even more unclear. No attempt is made to address that question in the central section, “Scotland’s Story”, nor is there any clear, overarching sense of how to brand Scotland consistently around the world.

At the same time, substantial and important components of the previous strategy are being lost. Partnerships between schools, cities and businesses are being put at risk by the decision not to renew the long-standing and productive co-operation agreements between Scotland and key regions in Europe and around the world. There is no longer any emphasis on the importance of promoting Scotland’s cities as competitive international centres through urban design and regeneration and effective branding and marketing. The establishment and promotion of transport routes to and from Scotland is no longer a priority on this Government’s international agenda, and yet that is essential in creating the optimum conditions for economic growth through business and tourism.

This Government has frequently been accused of adopting a style-over-substance approach, and yet even the style of the framework document leaves a lot to be desired. Not only has the Government omitted to include vital areas of importance while offering little that is really new, but it has failed to provide any detail on how it will implement the few pledges that it has made. For example, both policies—the previous Administration’s policy and this one—make mention of education, lifelong learning and research in their international agendas. The previous strategy set out at least 10 clear objectives—the Executive detailed how it would enhance the profile of Scottish education and research institutions to attract overseas students, researchers and investment and, at the same time, promote links between academia and industry. By contrast, the new international framework acknowledges only that

“Promotion of Scotland’s institutions and their innovative capabilities should therefore be a key facet of our overall brand promotion strategy abroad”,

without providing any information on how it is intended to achieve that end, whether that general statement is the only target and—crucially—what measures will be put in place to monitor and evaluate progress.

Linda Fabiani: Does Mr Chisholm, or do his colleagues, understand the concept of a framework or of Government ministers right across

the board working together for what is best for Scotland without needing to tick boxes and have directions every step of the way?

Malcolm Chisholm: Of course, I understand the concept of a framework and accept that three action plans sit underneath this framework document, copies of two of which I was handed five minutes before I came into the chamber. We are not debating those plans today but, that said, it is fair to say that none of them covers the topic that I am addressing and I will move on to mention others that the action plans do not cover in any way. If the Government had covered those topics anywhere else, I would not have a complaint but, as far as I am aware, they are not covered. Education and lifelong learning have been seriously downgraded in the new framework, but I do not have time to go into the examples that I had hoped to mention.

I turn to the “New priorities” section, towards the end of the document. The arc of prosperity countries are mentioned alongside those of the Commonwealth, and yet the statement of intent warrants barely three sentences of what is—admittedly—a short and flimsy document. Of course, I have no objection to getting more detail somewhere else. If there are to be no further action plans or other supporting information on the arc of prosperity countries, perhaps the minister will say more when she sums up. Perhaps she will say exactly how she intends to co-ordinate our efforts in those countries and what the focus and geographical extent of those activities will be.

In her evidence to the European and External Relations Committee, the minister said:

“There are approximately twice as many residents of India in higher education as there are people in Scotland.”—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 29 April 2008; c 602.]

With that in mind, surely we need more information on the Government’s announcement in the framework that a priority will be to

“strengthen links with India”.

We have one SDI office in New Delhi. What further resources will be made available in India? Will the geographic focus continue to be on New Delhi? What further new initiatives does the Government plan in India?

I do not have time to quote from the evidence that Sir David Edward gave to the European and External Relations Committee on 22 January 2008. However, an international development organisation asked me to raise the issue: why India and not Pakistan, too? I could raise other similar questions, but I said that I would raise that one.

Linda Fabiani: Will the member give way?

Malcolm Chisholm: I do not think that I can, as I am in the final minute of my speech.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: The member is concluding.

Malcolm Chisholm: My amendment mentions working in co-operation with the United Kingdom Government. I was pleased to see in the section entitled “A Fresh Approach”, at the end of the framework document, that there is an intention to make full use of UK resources. I had thought, rather naively, that the minister would accept my amendment and I hope that she will reconsider.

I move amendment S3M-1838.2, to insert at end:

“in co-operation with the UK Government and including international development objectives as a key priority.”

15:40

Ted Brocklebank (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con): Governments should be aspirational, so we can associate with much in today's motion. The Scottish people have always been aspirational and they deserve no less from those who seek to represent them. Equally, the Scots have always been restlessly international and the new worlds of the United States, Canada, Australasia and South Africa owe much to the contribution of Scottish settlers. Two Scots—James Wilson, from near my home town of St Andrews, and John Witherspoon, from East Lothian—were signatories to the American declaration of independence. Canada's first Prime Minister, John A Macdonald, spent his early years in Glasgow, and the founding father of Australia was Lachlan Macquarie from Mull.

Of course, our aspirations and internationalism have occasionally led to disaster. I wonder whether, had the Darien scheme not collapsed so spectacularly in 1699, facing the nation with bankruptcy, the Scottish Parliament would have voted so convincingly to join the union in 1707. However, as part of and, arguably, because of the union, Scotland has had an importance abroad that is totally out of proportion to its size. The great Canadian writer Hugh MacLennan, whose people came from Kintail, went as far as to claim that, without the Scots, there never would have been a country called Canada. They were the mortar that allowed the English and the French to bind together, he wrote. And so it was elsewhere. We have blood ties around the world and, sadly, on the European continent, much spilled blood.

According to some estimates, as many as 40 million people of Scots descent may be scattered around the world, so the Government is right to seek ways in which to ensure that Scotland is competitive in an increasingly globalised society and to involve the diaspora in every way possible. We in the Conservatives totally support the

aspiration to influence people to choose Scotland as a great place to live, learn, visit, work, do business and invest. I am glad that the minister confirmed that those efforts should be within a UK context, making full use of the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council, as outlined in my amendment. To seek to go it alone in international affairs or to act in too much of a gung-ho manner would be counter-productive for the nation and for the fledgling Scottish National Party Administration.

We applaud the minister's stated reluctance on direct intervention and associate ourselves with the policy of creating the right climate to support links and opportunities with stakeholders. We, too, believe that excellence should be at the heart of what we seek to achieve and we welcome the various tourism, population and economic growth targets that the Government has set. We remember all too clearly the dreadful economic legacy that the SNP inherited from the previous Executive, under which Scotland fared woefully in regional and international economic comparisons. However, it is only fair to point out that, according to a survey that was published today by the University of Glasgow and the University of Strathclyde, it is most unlikely that the SNP Government will hit its key economic targets by 2011.

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): Does Ted Brocklebank accept that, despite his counsel of despair, Scotland was voted the European region of the future by the Financial Times Group's *fDi* magazine in 2004-05?

Ted Brocklebank: I can only say that, in every other league table that I looked at in that time, we appeared to end up bottom.

Dealing with the world outside the European Union, we welcome the commitment to a more focused American and Canadian presence. We have the minister's assurance that the recent Scotland week mission was more cost effective than similar missions by the previous Administration, but we look forward to having the factual evidence. How much business was actually done and what tangible benefits will accrue?

We support the refreshed China plan and believe that the Government is right to identify excellence in research as a priority for young Chinese people choosing to study in Scotland. In that respect, I am delighted to welcome Fife Council's decision to grant planning permission for the University of St Andrews's new medical research centre. The project has already attracted an £8 million investment from Singapore. With St Andrews being the only Scottish seat of learning that currently features in the UK top-10 list, many more students from the far east are likely to make use of those state-of-the-art facilities.

India, Pakistan and the other Commonwealth countries are natural spheres of influence for Scotland. As an executive member of the Scottish branch of the Commonwealth Parliamentary Association, I have learned just how high Scotland ranks among visiting Commonwealth parliamentarians. We should never underestimate those links, and we should constantly seek to develop them.

On international aid, we totally support the initiative of the previous Executive in developing links with Malawi. We welcome the extra funding that the Government has made available for international development, and we are sure that that kind of internationalism will be mutually beneficial.

On Europe, things are not so straightforward. We accept the recent committee report's finding that Scotland must get in early when European Union laws are being formulated, to make their implementation easier at home, but we remain deeply sceptical that the current approach of the United Kingdom Government is likely to have a significant impact on Brussels. All we can do is rely on the Irish to throw out the wretched constitutional treaty once and for all.

The minister continues to be disingenuous about the possibility of the Scottish Cabinet Secretary for Rural Affairs and the Environment ever leading negotiations on fisheries in Brussels. Although his input is clearly important for Scottish fisheries, I cannot see how a UK minister could ever accept a representative from one of the devolved countries negotiating on behalf of the other parts of the UK. Scotland has conflicting fishing interests with the Irish, the Welsh and the west countrymen for starters, so I am afraid that Richard Lochhead will have to concentrate on what is attainable rather than what is aspirational.

I support important aspects of today's motion, but I close by moving the amendment in my name.

I move amendment S3M-1838.1, to leave out from "a means to extend" to end and insert:

"part of the means to extend, focus and align the actions and policies of the government and public sector partners to these ends while stressing the need to "make full use of the UK resources at our disposal", including "the Foreign and Commonwealth Office network around the world to maximise business, cultural and educational opportunities for Scotland", and "engage more directly with the British Council in our priority markets with a view to maximising the opportunities to showcase Scotland's cultural and educational excellence abroad", as outlined in the International Framework document."

15:46

Iain Smith (North East Fife) (LD): Sadly, today's debate is being held under the shadow of the massive human tragedy unfolding in Burma.

The scale of devastation—with tens of thousands dead and at least 1 million homeless and in need of food, water and shelter—is massive, and relief efforts are not being helped by the repressive military regime. I am sure that this Parliament will give its support to the efforts of relief agencies and Governments across the world to break through the barriers and try to support those hit by the cyclone.

Today's debate is about Scotland and its place on the international stage. It is about how we best promote Scotland and our partnerships within the UK, with Europe and with the rest of the world. There are times when one might be forgiven for thinking that it has been only since last May that Scotland, the Scottish Government and this Parliament have had any engagement with the international community. Obviously, we are all deeply grateful to the First Minister, who set out last month on his Golden Hind and discovered America. Actually, we did know that it was there before. In the years since devolution, we in Scotland have been positively engaged with America and with other parts of the world, which has had many positive benefits for Scotland.

To be fair, the "Scottish Government International Framework" document seems to recognise the very valuable work carried out by the previous Administration. Much of the document is about taking that work forward.

Scotland has always been a nation that looks outward. Scotland and Scots have made an impact on the world that far outweighs our size. We are world leaders in many fields and a potential world beater in others—maybe in football one day; who knows?

We have a strong global position in economic sectors such as financial services and biosciences. We have the potential to lead the world in renewable energy technologies, particularly in wave and tidal power. Our universities, and particularly our oldest university in St Andrews, have a worldwide reputation not just for the quality of teaching and learning but as centres of excellence in cutting-edge research.

Even our colleges lead the way in developing new ways to deliver Scottish education to international students. Elmwood College, based in Cupar in my constituency, has pioneered partnerships with a number of universities in China to develop and deliver golf education courses, based on Scottish qualifications.

However, we must bear in mind the fact that Scotland's international reputation in teaching and research is threatened by the underfunding of further and higher education by this Scottish National Party minority Government. We cannot

act on the international stage unless we ensure that our domestic house is in order.

On economic development, SDI has been internationally recognised as the world's most consistently high-performing agency—a reputation that, sadly, is under threat by the failure of the SNP Government to fill the vacancy at SDI's head. My colleague Liam McArthur may say more about that.

VisitScotland has a vital role in promoting inward tourism, particularly next year with the year of homecoming. I am sure that, whenever we meet members of the diaspora, we all remind them of that year.

Scotland's influence on the international stage is greatly enhanced by being able to influence and work in partnership with UK agencies and take advantage of the facilities at UK missions abroad. That includes the work of the British Council—which is referred to in the Conservative amendment—in supporting and promoting Scottish culture around the world. The work includes support for the international tours of the National Theatre of Scotland's production of "Black Watch", which has been a great success worldwide.

The international framework document does not contain a great deal that is new and there is little on the surface with which anyone could disagree. However, when we scratch beneath the surface, we see the real priority of the SNP Government's international agenda: it is not about promoting Scotland but about promoting nationalism.

Take, for example, the "Action Plan on European Engagement", which forms part of the international framework. No one can disagree with the premise that Scotland should seek to maximise its influence on the European Union and its policies, particularly those that have a direct impact on Scotland. One would expect the Scottish Government's action plan to focus exclusively on how we can best influence the development of policy in key areas—such as energy, maritime strategy, climate change, fishing and farming—and how we can best exert our influence on the European Commission directly and through the United Kingdom. Instead, it takes the focus away from protecting and promoting Scotland's interests to talk about an independent Scotland in Europe. It promotes a nationalist conversation in Brussels, which is unlikely to result in Scotland being taken more seriously by the decision makers there. Indeed, it is likely to have the opposite effect: Scotland being taken less seriously.

There is a great deal of good will towards Scotland around the world, and a great deal of good will in the Scottish Parliament for us to work

together as team Scotland to promote Scotland and its interests. However, those who seek to pursue a narrow agenda that does not enjoy the support of the Parliament or of the people of Scotland undermine that good will. There was one sour note in the team Scotland efforts in North America for Scotland week: the words that were put in the mouth of the distinguished master of ceremonies—whom I will not name to avoid embarrassing her—by SNP spin doctors at the start of the tartan day dinner on Capitol hill. They were wholly inappropriate and I found them embarrassing.

Alex Salmond has shown that he is happy to tout for support for his nationalist ambitions from any despotic regime anywhere in the world at any time. The Scottish Government must put Scotland's national interests before the interests of the Scottish nationalists. The key focus of the Government's international framework should be promoting Scotland by developing its economic, education, tourism and cultural links and protecting its interests in Europe. That will all be undermined if time and resources are wasted in promoting the minority agenda of an independent Scotland, which serves only to confuse the international community about what Scotland is and has to offer.

Nationalist politicians are free to waste their own time promoting their negative independence agenda abroad, but it is not the role of the Scottish Government to do that. Its job is to stand up for all Scots and to work within the United Kingdom to promote and protect the interests of Scotland at home and abroad. Let us be clear: the Parliament represents the people of Scotland and the Scottish Government is answerable to it. That is democracy.

I move amendment S3M-1838.3, to insert at end:

"but does not consider it in the best interests of Scotland for the Scottish Government to promote policies which do not command the support of the Parliament and, in particular, does not believe that the International Framework or any of the related documents or actions of the Scottish Government should contain any reference to Scottish independence, for which the minority Scottish Government has no mandate nor any authority from the Parliament to promote."

15:52

Christopher Harvie (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP): Yesterday, as a member of the Economy, Energy and Tourism Committee, I observed through lashing rain scores of people splashing around in milky, sulphurated coolant water from a power station in an atmosphere that said rotten eggs very loudly. That was Iceland's blue lagoon, which draws more than 330,000 visitors annually—equivalent to the entire population.

Some aspects of Icelandic economics are, let us say, a bit vertiginous—although probably no more so than what the city of London gets up to—but the blue lagoon is great for skin disease and proves that it is possible to have fun and draw tourists in sub-zero temperatures with four hours of winter daylight. It is a triumph of the ingenuity of a small state, so I thank Linda Fabiani for highlighting the need to ready Scotland for similar challenges in these islands, the EU and beyond: to develop that level of ingenuity, the *perfidium ingenium Scotorum*. Small, acrobatic countries do it well; old, post-imperial countries are not so smart.

Did the Icelanders know about our iconic equivalent—the Falkirk wheel? I asked religiously in the ministries, but they had never heard of it. People such as Iain Smith ought to take this into account: if one looks up Scotland in the index of any European Union handbook, one discovers that, on the whole, it is lucky if it gets any more mentions than San Marino in front of it and Somalia behind it. Being independent registers; being in the limbo of a culture nation or a culture region does not.

Jeremy Purvis (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD): Does Christopher Harvie acknowledge that, when a delegation from the Parliament visited Iceland two years ago, the strong message from the Icelandic Government was that it was extremely concerned that, when the Americans remove their military base from Iceland, the economy will be extremely fragile? The Icelanders have relied for the past 30 years on the American military for their economic development and international position.

Christopher Harvie: The Americans have withdrawn their base, but I was not conscious, when I was in Iceland, of any great determination there to seek reunion with Denmark.

Independence puts a country on the map. It involves a choice of partners to suit our strategies—smaller states that are interested in technology and third-world partners, rather than military allies and supposedly high-spending, wealthy clients. We are not a gated community.

We need instruments that facilitate technical and cultural twinnings, in particular using our advantages in holding a petroleum supply that is steadily increasing in price and using the future prospects of renewable energy technologies—which will come from EU nations and Japan, rather than from diplomats or London-based bureaucracies. Again, that draws on Scandinavian practices.

Our immigration and settlement policy must meet our social, economic and demographic needs, rather than responding to panics induced

by the south-east of England media. I am currently trying to get an extension of stay in Britain for someone who qualified in a Scottish institution of higher education, but it is simply ruled out by the immigration policy of the south.

We need effective press and media in Britain. What might be called “Metrolit”, or the old BBC—and indeed the old British Council—are, in these commerce-driven times, much more likely to reflect the priorities of the English south-east. We require something to strengthen the projection of Scotland abroad in a way that we will simply not get through those institutions. We must overcome not English opposition but a powerful establishment, which *The Guardian* has called the United Kingdom of London, with its own powerful international connections. The bonuses that are paid in the City of London in a year could electrify all the railways of Scotland. The cost of a bog-standard branding campaign would probably equal most of the advances that have been paid to Scottish authors—with only one exception—for a quarter of a century.

As we saw in Iceland, autonomy can inspire imagination and new synergies. The requirement is to have money, guidance and executive competence ready to be directed to specific goals according to a specific timetable. I see no alternative to independence—although I have trodden the federal road in the past, albeit with remarkably few Labour or Liberal companions—followed by what I would call variable geometry links with Britain and Europe.

Next year is the 250th anniversary of the birth of Robert Burns. We must remember how international radical Rab was, and we should take our language from our democratic intellect. If nothing else, we might be able to expel tsars and icons coming from a not particularly democratic culture in favour of more “Sense and Worth” and self-determination in future.

15:58

Irene Oldfather (Cunninghame South) (Lab): I welcome the opportunity that the debate gives us to consider Scotland’s engagement on the European and international stages. It is appropriate to have such a debate in the run-up to Schuman day on 9 May. In the spirit of peaceful co-existence, I have decided to try to be positive and consensual, and to consider how far we in Scotland have travelled over the past decade.

I am proud of my Scottish heritage. I live in Scotland because I want to. Almost all my family live in the United States and South Africa, but I am here because I am very proud of being Scottish. We are a nation rich in culture, steeped in history and heritage and blessed with landscapes and

countryside of remarkable natural beauty. We are renowned the world over for our innovation and our poetic and literary genius. We think of Robert Louis Stevenson and Sir Walter Scott—and, coming from Ayrshire, I have to mention Robert Burns.

Our Scottish Parliament is not just one of our top visitor attractions; it is a visual reminder, if ever one was needed, of the importance of delivering democracy and accountability for the Scottish people.

We have much to promote and to be proud of. I pay tribute to Jack McConnell, who, through the previous Executive's national and international development strategies, showed vision and commitment and enabled us to fly the flag for Scotland and to be more self-determined than ever.

Let us remember that 10 years ago, devolution and the Scottish Parliament building were but a twinkle in the eye of the UK Government. Only 10 years ago, there would have been no forum in Scotland to debate an international strategy or to express solidarity with other Europeans on Schuman day. Now, we have the opportunity to provide Scottish solutions to Scottish problems. The UK Government has delivered that for Scotland.

In the past decade, the world has changed. UK and Scottish companies must face up to the challenge of globalisation, competition and new technologies far beyond what we could ever have conceived of in 1998.

I acknowledge what the minister said about the international strategy being a framework. However, it is important to consider how it will play out on the ground. The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism will sum up, and I ask him to provide more detail on how we will assist manufacturing companies based in Scotland, such as GlaxoSmithKline in my constituency, which is to lose 270 jobs over the next year and is facing the real uncertainties that competing in the global marketplace brings. How can we translate growing the Scottish economy into taking action that will safeguard Scottish manufacturing jobs?

In Ayrshire, where we are desperate to diversify from the electronics industry into other areas, we have been hit further by the withdrawal of the route development fund. I have serious concerns about the implications that that might have for Prestwick airport. As the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism knows, supporting transportation routes to and from Scotland is about not just transport but economic development and tourism. I am acutely aware that, in attempting to look for opportunities outside manufacturing and electronics, we in Ayrshire have placed a

considerable number of eggs in the aerospace basket. If anything should happen at Prestwick, we would be in an extremely vulnerable and fragile position, which I think could have wider ramifications throughout Scotland. I hope that the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism will support our endeavours and give us a bit more detail on that when he sums up.

That brings me to marketing and branding Scotland. When the previous European and External Relations Committee undertook an inquiry into promoting Scotland abroad a few years ago, we found that the Welsh promote their country in the vital North American market as being a gateway to mainland Europe. The considerable increase in the number of routes from Scotland to Europe's capitals could provide us with an opportunity to market Scotland in the US as a starting point for two-centre holidays. Americans are nervous about the language and cultural challenges that they face in mainland Europe and they are sensitive about security matters. Therefore, I think that it would be attractive to them to bypass airports such as Heathrow and come straight to Scotland via Prestwick international airport. We should use that potential to demonstrate Scotland's—and Ayrshire's—three great niche markets: golf, genealogy and green tourism.

I had wanted to say a bit more about Europe and Schuman day. It is important to remember that Schuman's speech was about building on solidarity, peace and the social agenda. Contemporary Europe is not without its extremist tendencies and peace cannot be taken for granted. It is important that we all hold dear to our common values and principles: our belief in democracy; our commitment to equality; and our desire for better government and effective use of the principle of subsidiarity in the new treaty. In those values and principles lie our greatest strength.

I support the amendment in the name of Malcolm Chisholm.

16:04

Hugh O'Donnell (Central Scotland) (LD): Scotland has always been an outward-looking nation and has never focused its attentions on the narrow navel-gazing of nationalism. Therefore, as my colleague Iain Smith said, the legitimate objectives of raising and improving the international recognition of our country and our economic and cultural place in the world must not be used as vehicles for promoting the SNP's independence agenda, which does not have majority support in Parliament.

I read some of the “Scottish Government International Framework” before I came to speak in this debate. As Malcolm Chisholm said, given the shallow nature of the framework, it is a bit difficult to criticise it.

I was interested to note that one of the documents that are available to members at the back of the chamber contains a fetching photograph of Tom McCabe. It is encouraging to see how much the minister is continuing the efforts of the previous Administration.

My comments about internationalising Scotland and the independence agenda aside, I will make more constructive observations on our role. Our role in international relationships must not be solely about seeking economic advantage, although that is crucial. It must also be about reaching out with a democratic and diplomatic hand and challenging some of the countries that we engage with over their records on human rights and equalities. As Amnesty International said recently, there is no doubt that engagement is a more productive tool than isolation, but that does not mean that human rights should be the elephant in the room in discussions with international partners, nor should the Government allow such engagement to legitimise behaviour by any country that is contrary to our belief in human rights or our democratic tradition.

I am therefore a little concerned and disappointed because—as far as I can see from her letter to the Presiding Officer in April—the Cabinet Secretary for Education and Lifelong Learning was content to enter a memorandum of understanding with China on education and barely makes passing reference to China’s record on human rights.

I am also concerned—I hope that the minister can provide clarification—that there seems to be a tendency in the documents to look for what could be called big returns from the big players. We tried that in economic development back in the 1980s by importing electronics factories to get the unemployment figures down, but it backfired on us. I would like us to cast our net wider and look at other options.

For example, there seems to be a basis for developing education and business links with a country such as the United Arab Emirates. There is already involvement with it in the higher education sector, as several Scottish universities are already exploring or developing links with the UAE. Emirates had the courage to start direct flights from Scotland, which I do not think any other national airline has done. A number of Scottish companies already deal with the UAE and we should consider such links—there are major opportunities. The Dubai Government’s strategic plan, which was published in 2007, identified six

key strategic development aims, which are compatible with the aims and objectives that have been laid down by the Government for growing Scotland. The key areas that Dubai aims to develop are travel, tourism, financial services, professional services, transport and logistics, trade and construction. Scotland is well placed to make the most of those opportunities and some companies are beginning to do so. However, a step change is required in the Scottish Government’s approach. That is where the framework is lacking in detail and I hope that the minister will be able to provide further clarification.

One thing that we have in Brussels and elsewhere that might help within the UAE is a Scotland department to develop those links. We have benefited in many ways from educational and business visits from various existing partners in the UAE. Such developments need to be explored and my understanding is that, thus far, approaches from the UAE have not been particularly well received. It would be easy enough to develop an understanding in respect of education or any other field of endeavour with the UAE and many other countries—time prohibits me from referring to them.

I encourage the Government to ensure that its energies are focused on putting the interests of Scotland first and on widening the net of the international agenda that it has set.

16:10

Shirley-Anne Somerville (Lothians) (SNP): I welcome the development of a framework for engagement in international activities, and the recognition by the Scottish Government of the need to place Scotland as a responsible nation on the world stage. I want to focus on one particular aspect of the strategy, which is the need to create the conditions for talented people to be able to visit Scotland and to live, learn, work and remain in Scotland.

Nation states, devolved areas and federal regions across Europe and beyond are all looking to attract skilled workers in the highly competitive global marketplace. It is therefore absolutely essential that Scotland be able to compete in order to fill our skills gaps, boost our population growth rate and improve our underperforming economy.

Watching our political opponents at Westminster scuffle over who can be toughest on immigration has demonstrated once again that Scotland’s needs are not being met by the UK policy: Scotland is still sitting on a demographic time bomb. Prior to the accession of the eastern European states to the EU, we had the fastest-declining population in Europe, with a projected

fall in the population of 10 per cent by 2041. The welcome influx of workers from eastern Europe has brought more optimistic projections in the short term, but we cannot afford to take our eye off the ball. The levels of European migration that we have seen since 2004 are not expected to continue—indeed, many of those people are already returning home, which will leave Scotland as the only part of the UK whose population is expected to fall in the medium to long term.

Equally serious is Scotland's ageing population. The ratio of persons under 16 or over pensionable age to those of working age is predicted to significantly increase.

I welcome the Scottish Government's target to match the average EU population growth over the period from 2007 to 2017—and, as my pregnancy is the fourth among SNP MSPs and their partners since we came to power, we are clearly doing all that we can to fulfil that Government commitment.

Hugh O'Donnell: Not all of you.

Shirley-Anne Somerville: We can work on the rest of the group.

I also welcome the refreshingly proactive approach that the Scottish Government is demonstrating to building relationships, engaging with the international community and expanding the use of our cultural assets to promote Scotland to a wider audience. However, the action that the Government can take to tackle skills shortages is limited in its scope, because immigration and asylum remain outwith our control. The Scottish Parliament was formed to allow us to find Scottish solutions to Scottish problems. This is surely an example of an area in which policy here must diverge from that in the rest of the UK.

To give it its due, I should say that the former Scottish Executive made a start on that with the launch of the fresh talent initiative. I was pleased to see Linda Fabiani's announcement last month of further investment in projects to prepare international students who are studying in Scotland to move into work here, too. However, the fresh talent initiative falls woefully short of what is required to tackle Scotland's skills shortages, and has even fallen far short of its own limited expectations. Since the scheme was launched, just over 6,000 people have successfully applied to live and work in Scotland. That is far fewer than the project's own initial target of 8,000 new skilled immigrants per year. However, even if the fresh talent initiative had succeeded in bringing 8,000 extra skilled immigrants to Scotland each year, that is still far fewer than our proportional share of UK immigration.

This spring sees the fresh talent initiative being incorporated into the UK-wide points-based system for managed migration, which will mark the

end of the much-needed—albeit limited—competitive advantage that the scheme provided for Scotland. Far more has to be done if we are to reverse our declining and ageing population and fill Scotland's skills gaps.

The lack of flexibility within the UK arrangement is in stark contrast to the powers over immigration that are enjoyed by other devolved governments. For example, Australia recognised the benefit of area-specific migration policies more than a decade ago and has since 1995 successfully implemented various state-specific migration mechanisms. Those have enabled states with acute population problems to decide on the suitability of applicants to contribute to the economy of their areas, even when they fall short of national criteria, and for visas to be issued for that state alone. That has been hugely successful: between 1996 and 2003, the number of skilled migrants to states increased by some 600 per cent.

The Canada-Quebec accord of 1991 lays out the roles of federal and state Governments on immigration into Quebec. The level of control over the volume and profile of immigrants has allowed Quebec to begin to tackle effectively its problems of population decline. Since that accord was signed, migration into Quebec has increased, which the Government has welcomed.

As the examples of Australian states and Quebec show, it is not the case that only a nation state with full control over its borders can operate a successful immigration policy. Devolving immigration in the UK would allow the creation of a Scottish green-card system that was designed for economic immigrants, which would address our demographic problems and our skills gaps. That would allow us to meet skills shortages in Scotland rather than have our needs subsumed by those of our larger neighbour.

The development of an international framework is another positive step by the Government, which is proving that even with its limited powers it has the talent to build Scotland's international relationships and to develop a more positive and outward-looking nation. Members can imagine what we could do if we had more powers and did not have one hand tied behind our back.

16:16

Helen Eadie (Dunfermline East) (Lab): The Scottish Government's international framework interests me considerably. While reading the *Official Report* of some of the European and External Relations Committee's proceedings on the international strategy, I was struck by several contributions that ring true to my knowledge and experience.

My top line in the debate is to support the views of Sir David Edward, with whom I agreed strongly when I read his comments in the *Official Report*. He said:

“Another area on which we need to focus is the emerging democracies that aspire to be part of Europe.”—[*Official Report, European and External Relations Committee*, 22 January 2008; c 316.]

The John Smith Memorial Trust does a lot of work on that, and a body with which Sir David is connected—the International Association of Business and Parliament, of which the Scottish Parliament and Business Exchange is a component—does a great deal of work in Georgia, Armenia, Moldova and Ukraine. Those are not developing countries; they are emerging democracies. We have not only an interest in them, but a duty to devote attention to those countries.

As Malcolm Chisholm said, international development is interlinked with and is an integral part of the very being of Scotland's people, churches, missionary work and voluntary organisations.

Linda Fabiani: I make it plain that in the international framework—I emphasise that it is a framework—international development is a priority. From that, we have the international development plan, which details all the policy and matches our increased resources. I also make it clear that the Indian sub-continent is mentioned in the international development policy.

Helen Eadie: Thank you. Getting a hold of development plans has always been difficult; one was published only today.

Janet Brown of the Scottish Qualifications Authority agreed with Sir David Edward's sentiments. From an education perspective, we can add value in the countries that I mentioned as they develop.

Sir David Edward and Janet Brown expressed one of the most important points at the round-table discussion that I read, which Malcolm Chisholm chaired: it was that for any society and business to flourish, there must be stable democracy. Achievement of that remains our challenge in many countries. Our experience of the oil and gas industry in the UK has been built on a stable political environment—at least until now. Whether that is set to change remains to be seen. We can learn from Quebec a slightly different lesson from that which Shirley-Anne Somerville taught us. A major bank has moved out of Quebec in the face of political instability there. It is not the only company to have done so.

The European and External Relations Committee's round-table discussion also dealt with eastern Europe. The *Official Report* documents Gil

Paterson talking about the low cost of, and ease of access to, the emerging markets in eastern Europe for Scottish businesses, relative to the Chinese, Indian, Asian and North American markets. He made the important point that smaller businesses in Scotland are more likely to access eastern Europe than the other markets that I cited. However, I read in the evidence to the committee that support for businesses in eastern Europe is almost non-existent and that all resources are siphoned off to China and the other places that I mentioned.

According to Professor Nikolai Zhelev, who lives in Dundee and is the honorary consul for Bulgaria and president of the Scottish Bulgarian Association, it has been estimated that 30,000 Brits have bought properties and businesses in Bulgaria. That is relevant to languages issues and support for business. Last year, having written to every university in Scotland, I discovered that not one of them offers either Romanian or Bulgarian language learning.

Of course, the market in China offers lucrative returns on investments that go well beyond those that are offered in eastern Europe, but greater risks and costs are attached to such investments. I hope that the Scottish Government will seriously address such issues in the action plans that are to flow from the international framework. It is apparent that stakeholders who took part in the round-table discussion take such issues seriously. I am concerned that the framework does not incorporate languages—which are important—as a main theme. Business representatives who attended that discussion said that the ability to engage socially using another language is important.

I note from the framework that the Scottish Government has identified that linking proactively with other countries will be a priority, but ministers do not even visit Brussels or EU partner countries. I have lodged up to a dozen parliamentary questions that have asked for details of Scottish Government ministers' visits. To date, there have been visits by the First Minister, Kenny MacAskill, Richard Lochhead and the Solicitor General for Scotland. That hardly represents an energetic and proactive commitment. I welcome the fact that the Scottish Government plans to encourage more visits, but I note from the *Official Report* that 60 European Council meetings have been held since the SNP Government took office. It can be seen from the evidence that I mentioned that only one minister has attended a Council meeting, which is lamentable. That hardly smacks of a Scottish Government being committed to promoting Scotland energetically.

16:22

Rob Gibson (Highlands and Islands) (SNP): I will try to inject a little more energy into the SNP's contribution to the debate—not that there was no energy in our contribution before.

It is important to be aspirational in the international framework because the scenario is constantly changing. The minister mentioned the limited resources that we have under devolution. It is obvious to me that ministers in the current Government have been to Europe and other places far more than were previous ministers. Indeed, we should deal with our engagement with the EU—Mike Russell led a ceilidh in Brussels just last week, for goodness' sake. Helen Eadie had better find out about such things in the answers to her questions. I should say that Mike Russell led that ceilidh after business.

When he came back from the United States of America, the First Minister stated that following such a successful visit at a modest cost, the next move would be to have a Scottish week in Russia. That is a great idea. Markets have been identified in China and India in the far east, but we are missing out on a huge nation that is becoming an important part of our lives, as part of Europe. The Nazis slaughtered 20 million people when they invaded Russia. As Dick Gaughan said, the Russians

“died fighting on our side”.

We have a lot in common with Russians. We stood alone with Russia during the war and Russia has felt enormously isolated in the world. Its birth as a capitalist country was harsh, and many of its younger leaders regret the impositions of the International Monetary Fund and the World Trade Organization, and the turbo-capitalism that was imposed on it. They want to forge links with the social democratic countries in western Europe that are their natural allies. Our international strategy can help to develop such links. We already have quite a lot of economic links with Russia; after all, London relies to a great extent on gas from the middle of Russia and beyond.

I have had the pleasure of meeting senior officials from the province of Yugra, which is three hours east of Moscow by air, beyond the Urals. Yugra is the richest oil province in Russia. Some 1.5 million well-off people there work in an industry that is powering the Russian economy. Those people are not just looking for economic links, although I hope that they will get them through Scottish Enterprise and Highlands and Islands Enterprise outlets, so that we can start to get that trade. Tens of thousands of Russians are coming to this country. I quote a document that was produced under the previous Administration just before the G8 summit, entitled “Scotland's Links With Russia”, which says that 20,000 visitors from

Russia come to Scotland every year and that Russian tourists spend more than twice as much as tourists of any other G8 nationality. The potential for us to seek out such markets is something that our international strategy cannot afford to ignore.

The same document talks about “Celebrating the Saltire” in acknowledging our links with Russia. It states:

“Both Scotland and Russia have the same patron saint St Andrew. The saltire became a potent symbol of nationhood when Peter the Great, used it as the principal Russian order of knighthood. Fife born Samuel Greig served in the British Navy joining the Russian Navy in 1764. He was responsible for transforming the Russian Navy during the reign of Catherine the Great and today the saltire is the emblem of the Russian Navy.”

Members should note that the saltire was a potent symbol of nationhood in 1764 and it is an even more potent symbol of nationhood now that the Scottish Government is independently minded and is going out to the world to deal with our friends, welcoming them as friends to a Scotland that aspires to be a normal country.

If people ask us about our national conversation and how the people see our future, I do not think that they want to talk about our doing nothing or being unambitious. The Liberal Democrat amendment is therefore completely misplaced, as it would not allow the free flow of ideas that comes naturally from a confident Government. I like to think that it is possible for our Government to be out there with its policies uninhibited by the silly and petty-minded approach of the Liberal Democrats, who today look even more last century than they did before.

In the European context, extending the European Union towards Kiev and Moscow would be good for us, and we can play a part in that. However, at the moment, we are also playing our part in the European Union by holding out the hand of friendship to Iceland—which was mentioned earlier—and Norway. Such countries have so much in common with us that our international strategy must embrace them. It is now possible for us to have a Government that tries to build those friendships by perhaps encouraging those countries to join the European Union. Our common interests in our natural resources—fish and energy—make it necessary for us to harness such friendships in north-western Europe, which has so much to contribute to the continent.

I am delighted that the new strategy looks out towards such things. It must look for some of the great opportunities that exist, particularly in Europe and Russia.

16:28

Liam McArthur (Orkney) (LD): The motion is in Linda Fabiani's name, but the reference to the need

"to extend, focus and align the actions and policies of the government and public sector partners"

surely betrays the invisible hand of the high priest of mind-mapping, Mr Mather. I dare say that Linda Fabiani will insist that that is all part of joined-up government. However, it is what the motion does not say that is most revealing about this minority Government's approach and its determination to stick to the Swinney mantra of downplaying independence at home while pursuing a narrow, partisan agenda overseas when the opportunity presents itself. There is no mandate for such an agenda: it does not command the support of the chamber and, more important, it commands little and diminishing support among the wider public in Scotland. The amendments that have been lodged by Iain Smith, Malcolm Chisholm and Ted Brocklebank address that concern, set the proper context and rectify what is surely an oversight on the part of the minister.

As with the Government's economic strategy that was launched last year, I found much in the framework with which I whole-heartedly agree. That is perhaps no surprise, as a great deal of the framework borrows heavily—indeed, as Malcolm Chisholm said, some of it is lifted directly—from the strategies that were adopted by the previous Executive, despite more of the minister's year zero rhetoric, highlighted by Iain Smith. For example, who can take issue with the need to develop a globally competitive and successful Scotland? Whatever has been done to date, I do not dispute the need for Scotland to do more to remove the barriers to attracting high-quality talent to Scotland and to take steps to retain the talent that we have already attracted by improving the integration of new Scots into our society, but the framework provides little by way of detail on how those laudable aspirations will be achieved.

Like other members—perhaps not including Shirley-Anne Somerville—I recall the less than fulsome endorsement that the SNP gave to the establishment of the fresh talent initiative when it was in opposition. We remain in the dark as to how the Government intends that further success will be delivered—although I pay glowing tribute to Ms Somerville's personal endeavours.

Likewise, I welcome the recognition that major events such as Glasgow 2014 and the Ryder cup can be real drivers of economic growth. Building a lasting legacy from those events will not be straightforward, however, and will take more than warm words. Relentless focus and commitment will be required. In that regard, the Government's record on sportscotland does not bode well.

In acknowledging Scotland's financial services sector as a genuine success story of recent years, the framework may be stating the obvious, but it could have served a useful function if it had gone on to identify how the Government intends to support and develop that sector internationally.

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism talks incessantly about how he is getting various groups together in a room—sometimes rooms with mirrors, usually rooms with flip-charts but always rooms resounding to the echoes of brains being stormed. However, no group of stakeholders and no section of the business community or of academia have urged him or his ministerial colleagues to pack the passport and set off on a mission to talk up Scottish independence.

Scotland is distinct and our brand in overseas markets is strong, although perhaps not always as strong as we like to think. In sectors as diverse as tourism and life sciences, we have a first-class reputation that provides a solid foundation on which to build further success. Indeed, from ministerial visits overseas in which I participated, I know the positive perception and level of awareness that exists about what Scotland can offer. I remember one European deputy foreign minister—albeit that, I admit to Christopher Harvie, he was not Icelandic—who declared that he would give his right arm to be in Scotland's position. That strength of brand—of what Scotland is and what it can offer—is not diminished in any way by our being part of the United Kingdom. Indeed, that has enabled Scotland to have a presence and influence and generally to punch above its weight worldwide. Ted Brocklebank spoke learnedly about the extent to which that is an historic phenomenon.

In opposition, SNP members were critical of ministerial visits abroad; in office, SNP ministers have overcome that aversion and even developed a bit of a taste for such visits. Where those involve the First Minister embarking on ego-trips to Brussels to promote his one-way national conversation to MEPs—who, perhaps in anticipation, had taken themselves off to Strasbourg—no useful purpose is served. Where a confusing message about Scotland's place in the UK and EU is promoted by a minority Administration that has no mandate to do so, active damage can be done.

Scotland achieved the status of European region of the future in 2004-05 and again for 2008-09. It was also northern Europe/UK region of the future in 2006-07. Those awards require clarity about our position in the UK and in the EU. Talk of independence and EU membership negotiations may play to the gallery at SNP conferences, but it works against the interests of Scotland and Scotland's economy. That fact cannot have

escaped SNP ministers as they have trotted the globe. The extent to which they have been able to draw on the resources, support and market intelligence of the UK's embassies and councils across the world must have driven that message home.

Within that context, Scottish Development International has a vital role to play. I have seen at first hand the excellent work that SDI does for Scotland in key international markets. I know the value that is placed on that by Scottish businesses. That the Government has left the organisation without a permanent head for more than a year is deeply regrettable. For all its talk of clarity of visions and decisiveness, the Government's actions smack rather of dither and delay.

As Iain Smith said, the Government's decision to reduce higher education's resource funding in real terms next year is also likely to have an adverse impact on an area in which Scotland has enjoyed a competitive advantage overseas.

The Government's international framework and supporting strategies have much to commend them. They echo the approach of earlier documents, although they still require some fleshing out. However, the insidious pursuit overseas of an independence agenda causes confusion, damages our interests and has nothing to do with our country's aspirations and sense of ambition.

In the spirit of Schuman day, which I am grateful to Irene Oldfather for mentioning, I urge Linda Fabiani to think again.

16:34

Gavin Brown (Lothians) (Con): In summing up for the Scottish Conservatives, I want to touch on four main issues. First, I will reiterate the point that my colleague Ted Brocklebank made in both his amendment and his speech about the importance of relying on UK resources in the Foreign and Commonwealth Office. Secondly, I will touch on the positive aspects of the international framework, which includes some good work. Thirdly, I will highlight areas in the framework where there are gaps and where more could be done. When summing up the debate, the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism may want to take on board one or two of the issues that I raise.

Fourthly, I will comment briefly on the monitoring and tracking that must take place in the future, because a document, framework and policy is only as good as its delivery in practice. Clear monitoring arrangements must be in place. In her opening speech, the Minister for Europe, External Affairs and Culture stated that Scotland week had been a big success and that we knew categorically

that it had delivered good value, but it would be interesting for us to hear exactly what analysis of the event has been done. Obviously, the Government can tell us how much was spent on Scotland week, but it would be much more useful for us to know exactly what its short, medium and long-term benefits for the whole of Scotland are.

It is important that we work carefully in tandem with the UK Government and use existing resources carefully. Mr Brocklebank mentioned the Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council, which have offices and experience across the globe. They have an impeccable track record of delivering for Scotland and the UK, and it is important that we rely on that. The difference between the positions of Mr Brocklebank and Linda Fabiani is one of emphasis. It is true that our amendment reiterates a point that is included in the document, but the purpose of the amendment is to ensure that the point is emphasised properly and made a priority. At the moment, it is tucked away on page 6 of the document and not highlighted as a genuine priority to be taken forward. The Foreign and Commonwealth Office and the British Council can help us to create business, cultural and educational benefits in the future.

There is not much in the document with which we disagree. It contains a lot of good stuff and tells a positive story about Scotland. It talks about our educational establishments. Although we will have disagreements about the funding of those establishments, the bottom line is that they punch well above their weight internationally. We should be proud of what they do now and of what they can do in the future.

The document talks about the businesses that we have. We should be proud of our businesses, especially financial services, food and drink, life sciences and a host of others that punch well above their weight.

The document discusses the potential for tourism. Every party represented in the chamber supports the target of 50 per cent growth in tourism by 2015. The document also talks about events that we know that we will host. I make a personal plea for us to bid for a good football event in the future, possibly the European championship, but it remains to be seen whether that will happen.

I turn to the gaps in the document. Mr Mather will understand that the people who are most likely to give us business in the future are people who have given us business in the past. The countries from which we are most likely to get tourists in the future are countries that have provided us with tourists in the past. It is right that we should go after new markets and seize opportunities, but we

cannot give away ground in areas where we are already strong.

I will focus for a moment on tourism, as I have some knowledge of the issue. The countries from which most tourists to Scotland come are the USA, Germany, France, Ireland, Canada, Spain, Australia, Italy and the Netherlands, in that order; I cannot remember the other country in the top 10. Only three of those nine countries are mentioned in the international framework document. It talks about having relations with EU institutions and better relationships with Finland, Norway and Iceland—I have forgotten the collective term for those countries—but there is no mention of the countries with which we need to have stronger bilateral relationships. We are much more likely to get future tourists and business from Germany, France and Spain than from some of the other countries that have been mentioned. That is a gap in the document.

The document touches briefly on events south of the border. We must be mindful that we are more likely to do business with businesses and people south of the border than with the European countries that I mentioned. People south of the border are those most likely to move to Scotland and help us to create a better future. English tourists provide £1.7 billion a year to the Scottish economy; the rest of the world provides £1.4 billion. An international framework document should reflect the countries with which we already do business and the ones with which we are most likely to do business in future. Monitoring and tracking will be key. It will be good to hear about any monitoring of the USA visit and Highland 2007, so that we can apply the lessons learned from them to homecoming 2009.

16:41

Elaine Murray (Dumfries) (Lab): As other members have said, the sentiments in the international framework are not new; they were in the previous Executive's international strategy, which itself was underpinned by individual strategies for the United States, China and Germany. The success of the previous strategy was acknowledged by several contributors who gave evidence to the European and External Relations Committee earlier this year. As Malcolm Chisholm and Hugh O'Donnell pointed out, the framework is, if anything, less comprehensive and possibly rather less well expressed than that of the previous Executive. Like the Government's economic strategy, the framework is full of high-level aspirations with which many of us would agree, but it is short on the detail of how those aspirations might be achieved or how the framework's success will be assessed.

As the Labour amendment recognises, the framework contains little on international development and our responsibilities as a wealthy nation. International relations are not only about growing Scotland's economy; they are about how we contribute to tackling international issues such as poverty, climate change and food insecurity. The Scottish Government's international development policy, which was published today, contains welcome references, such as the continuation of Scotland's relationship with Malawi and the commitment to becoming a Fairtrade nation. I wonder why the Government feels unable to accept our amendment, which appears to be in agreement with that policy.

Linda Fabiani: I am quite relaxed about the amendment, but I think that it is superfluous because we state clearly in the international framework our responsibility for international development. The separate policy on international development follows from the framework. I am worried that there is a lack of understanding on Labour's behalf about what a framework is and how action plans work.

Elaine Murray: I assure the minister that there is no lack of understanding. The motion should refer to international development.

The international framework is intended to co-ordinate the Government's international activities with the priorities of the economic strategy. We will shortly hear from the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism, who I am sure will sum up for the Government in the motivational style for which he is renowned. I was beginning to think that he had been holding master classes for his colleagues. Linda Fabiani spoke of "flexible pragmatism" and

"agile ways of reaching out more widely to civic society".

Chris Harvie talked of "Small, acrobatic countries" and we heard Rob Gibson's revelation about Michael Russell as the dashing white sergeant leading a ceilidh in Brussels. I began to wonder whether the Government had some sort of job lot of glucosamine.

Whether the Government's actions equate with the rhetoric of the framework or, indeed, the Government's economic strategy, must be examined. There sometimes appears to be a dichotomy between Government rhetoric and action on Scotland's economy. The framework refers to VisitScotland's role in promoting Scotland overseas but, at the same time, the Government is reducing VisitScotland's funding in real terms by 0.5 per cent per annum over the period of the spending review. The Government has also removed support for tourism-based modern apprenticeships.

The framework refers to encouraging investment in Scotland, but the Government proposes to make Scotland the highest taxed part of the United Kingdom—a proposal that has not found favour with business. The final sentence of the framework aspires to

“influencing people to choose Scotland as a great place to live, learn, visit, work”,

but the Government has failed to come up with a successor to the route development fund, which developed direct air links with Europe, the United States and the middle east, benefiting both tourism and business. My colleague Irene Oldfather has raised concerns about the consequences for Glasgow Prestwick airport and presented a vision of how that airport could be used to promote Scotland overseas.

The Government's draft action plan on European engagement claims—the Liberals made much reference to this—that without independence the Government is seriously limited in its ability to represent Scotland's interests in Brussels. However, despite our encouragement, and despite concern from business that the current uncertainty over Scotland's constitutional status ought to be resolved, the Government is curiously reluctant to accelerate its proposals for a referendum on independence.

Reference is made in the international framework document to the successes of the financial services and life sciences sectors, but I am unclear as to how the Government intends to address the concerns that those sectors have about skills shortages at many levels—not just at undergraduate or graduate levels—in areas such as IT, science and pharmaceuticals, on which those sectors are crucially dependent.

The document has, of course, the mandatory references to the arc of prosperity countries and the Celtic lion—sorry, the celtic lion. I must have my Queen of the South Football Club hat on. However, in his intervention, Jeremy Purvis illustrated the dependence of Iceland on the United States of America and the effect that that has on Iceland's economy. The same is true for Ireland. Indeed, in Ireland, house prices fell by 9 per cent in the year to February 2008 and there is disillusionment with the euro, a significant slow-down in economic growth and even talk of a slump. The celtic tiger could be forgiven for feeling that it might be becoming an endangered species.

Aside from the oft-quoted Organisation for Economic Co-operation and Development statistics, there is evidence that Scotland compares well against other countries and has good prospects. The Financial Times group's *fDi* magazine awards for European cities and regions of the future 2008-09 rates Scotland higher than

any of the arc of prosperity regions overall. It rates Edinburgh as the top European city, Scotland as the second most business-friendly region next to London and Edinburgh as the second-best city for human resources next to London. That is not to suggest that we should be complacent, but it indicates that Scotland appears to be going in the right direction. That is partly due, of course, to Governments at all levels, past and present, but in particular to the business community in its widest sense.

There have been references to other questions that require answers. For example, Irene Oldfather raised at the European and External Relations Committee the issue of the attendance of ministers at European Council meetings in the past year, and Helen Eadie raised the issue again in the debate. I could ask ministers what future they envisage for Scottish Development International. The Minister for Europe was unable to explain that to the European and External Relations Committee last week. Perhaps the Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism can enlighten us.

At a meeting of Co-operation Development Scotland this morning, I was particularly interested to hear that the turnover of the top 300 global co-operative enterprises in 2006-07 was equivalent to that of the world's ninth largest economy. The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism aspires to increasing the contribution of co-operatives and social enterprises to the Scottish economy to match the contribution of such enterprises in Finland, Switzerland and Sweden. Many members in the chamber share that aspiration. I wonder whether the minister can advise what is being done to try to encourage those big global co-operatives to invest inwardly in Scotland.

I am pleased that this Government is taking forward the work of the previous Executive and I am happy to support the focus on sustainable economic growth in Scotland, but that needs to be balanced by a commitment to international development.

Linda Fabiani: Will the member give way?

Elaine Murray: I am in my final few seconds.

Again, I ask ministers to consider accepting our amendment so that the motion that the Parliament agrees refers both to the international framework and to the commitment to international development that is shared across the Parliament.

16:49

The Minister for Enterprise, Energy and Tourism (Jim Mather): The Scottish Government's international framework document

sets out a strategic objective for international activity. The approach is based on consultation with stakeholders who believe that flexibility is superior to a rigid adherence to targets for a long list of activities. That view has come up time after time when we run any session with any sector. The approach aligns the international framework with the national focus on increased sustainable growth. Therefore, the framework augments the work that my department has been doing with Scottish industrial sectors, an aspect of which has been to boost confidence in overseas locations as a source of sales, investment, talent and joint ventures and to build a stronger, more vivid, more meaningful Scottish brand.

The Scottish Government's international development policy and refreshed China plan focus on enlightened national self-interest and on altruism. We want more people, increased trade and higher GDP, more inward investment and more tourism—we want the year of homecoming in 2009 to be a resounding success—but we are also releasing Scottish values, interactions, capabilities, facilities and moneys as forces for good in the world.

We should regard the Government's role as catalytic. We will always strive to create the optimal conditions, which will ultimately enable links with the business, scientific and education communities, with cultural and civic Scotland and with the third sector to flower and to drive progress. That is the engine that will drive population and GDP goals and international activity. The international framework will help by enabling more people to see the merit of coming together to promote and benefit from the Scottish brand, thereby fulfilling their ambitions and boosting the national interest.

Our role is to facilitate and encourage more such exchanges and to identify key points of leverage at which our intervention can help to move things along. If there were more pairing in the Parliament, we could do even more—I would certainly welcome that. However, even as we play the ball as it lies we are getting across the message that Scotland is on the move. The enterprise networks have been reformed, international engagement is taking place, the Council of Economic Advisers is elevating debate and we are raising the profile of Scotland and its constituent parts at every opportunity.

This year's change of name and focus for Scotland week was hugely well received and sent the right signal, creating a platform for us to do the new and exciting things that get international attention, such as announcing the saltire prize with the National Geographic Society. I made 16 house calls on businesses and attended two receptions in the United States in six days and I found people

over there to be open and receptive to us, big style.

Members' speeches were useful and I have tried my best to capture the ideas and challenges that they contained. Irene Oldfather's mention of Schuman day was welcome. I am all for systems thinking and for pulling people together, and her patriotic analysis of landscape, literature and democracy in Scotland did her and the country credit. I acknowledge that Jack McConnell played a useful role in helping to internationalise Scotland; Henry McLeish and Donald Dewar did, too. First Minister status seems to promote a desire to make international connections, which I welcome. I remember Donald Dewar telling us that the Scottish Parliament was not an end in itself but a means to an end.

Irene Oldfather challenged us on how we help Scottish companies, particularly manufacturing companies. We are working more closely with companies sector by sector and we are getting people to see opportunities for joint ventures and outsourcing, for example. We are working hard with SDI to make international calls, to sell Scotland abroad better and attract investment, but ultimately it is the claim of right on economic powers that will make the difference. If there is fragility, it is a legacy; we see strengths and we will work on those strengths.

Liam McArthur: Does the minister accept that SDI's work is undermined, if not hobbled, by the lack of a permanent head? Given that we are a year into the current Government, should not that issue have been addressed?

Jim Mather: The key point is that SDI is an important organisation, which is vital to Scotland, so it is critical that we get the right person in place. The recruitment process is on-going and the interim leadership is doing a stellar job—I am talking about 26,000 added-value jobs last year. We take the issue seriously. It would have been devastating to have made a facile early appointment that was wrong for Scotland and we were determined not to do that.

The international development issue has been raised and raised again in the debate, but members have not yet recognised that the budget has doubled. That is the significant contribution that we have made. I say to Helen Eadie that the key point for a small country such as Scotland is the need to focus and move forward. In meeting one of the life sciences companies in Seattle last month, I was told:

"Cash may be king, but focus is Queen."

We will focus and drive Scotland forward accordingly.

Jeremy Purvis: Will the minister give way?

Jim Mather: I have taken a Liberal Democrat intervention. I want to move on to contributions from the Conservatives.

Ted Brocklebank was aspirational and internationalist. He gave the chamber an epic history lesson, but I wish that he could be a little more positive about the counter history. Scotland would have survived and done well under any set of circumstances. We will have to get Mr Brocklebank to improve his handling of good news.

Liam McArthur spoke about Scotland's status as EU region of the future, but he should have treated it much more seriously and vaunted it much more strongly. I do not have any such issue with Gavin Brown, who was optimistic and positive. Essentially, even when he talked of gaps in the document, he made me think. I took something positive from that criticism, too. I welcome his key point, which was on monitoring. A key early measurement of that is that doors are open to us—people are engaging with us. We are measuring jobs. In the longer term, I am keen to measure GDP in terms of the profits, jobs and wages at companies that are inward investing in Scotland and the companies that are exporting from Scotland. Gavin Brown's point that the most likely people on whom to build tourism growth are our existing customers is absolutely rock solid.

That is exactly what we were doing in making our house calls—

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Trish Godman): I am sorry to interrupt, minister, but far too many conversations are going on in the chamber.

Jim Mather: We reward our existing companies by paying serious attention to them, sitting round the table and asking, "What are the inhibitors? What can we do to allow you to do more business in Scotland or to allow your business activity to be more and more profitable?" We saw some fantastic results. For example, the Apache Corporation, which now runs the Forties oilfield, showed us the stellar rise in production that it has achieved in contrast to the dropping off in production under BP.

We are up to engaging with those self-nominating countries. Ministers—my colleague, Linda Fabiani, in particular—are working constantly with the consular service in Scotland. Last night, we were out, talking to the Japanese consul general who represents a country of 125 million. Rob Gibson spoke about Russia. Countries such as Japan and Russia see Scotland as a unique brand, the key factors of which are our huge capabilities and strong attributes in sector after sector. There is worldwide demand from countries to interact with Scotland. The fact that

we can leverage our 5 million person presence into the economies of Russia, the United States, Canada, Australia and Western Europe augurs well for us.

I learned from Christopher Harvie's speech, including about triumphs of ingenuity in Iceland, albeit that I could do without some of its economic aspects. The idea that small acrobatic countries will do well is a hard-wired view that I have held for a long time. I therefore support Shirley-Anne Somerville's comments on immigration policy being a requirement for Scotland, as are more economic powers. That is exactly the view that is held by Professor Robert Wright, of the University of Strathclyde—that arms-length arbiter and a world expert on Scottish population—who, in coming all the way from Canada to Scotland, saw things correctly for the first time, and clearly.

The key factor in the speeches of Liberal Democrat colleagues was the narrowness of their position. They require to take a more open-minded attitude to the options and opportunities that face Scotland. Our situation is one in which Scotland can burgeon. The antithesis of all that is the position of the Liberal Democrats, who want to limit Scotland and box it in. I encourage them to open their minds.

I endorse the objectives of the international framework and commend it thoroughly to the Parliament.

Business Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of business motion S3M-1846, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on behalf of the Parliamentary Bureau, setting out a business programme.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees the following programme of business—

Wednesday 14 May 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by First Minister's Statement: Moving Scotland Forward

followed by Stage 1 Debate: Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Bill

followed by Financial Resolution: Judiciary and Courts (Scotland) Bill

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 15 May 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Ministerial Statement: Equality and Diversity

followed by Scottish Government Debate: Schucksmith Report and the Future of Crofting in Scotland

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Finance and Sustainable Growth

2.55 pm Scottish Government Debate: Free Personal Care

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Wednesday 21 May 2008

2.30 pm Time for Reflection

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

followed by Business Motion

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business

Thursday 22 May 2008

9.15 am Parliamentary Bureau Motions

followed by Scottish Government Business

11.40 am General Question Time

12 noon First Minister's Question Time

2.15 pm Themed Question Time
Education and Lifelong Learning;
Europe, External Affairs and Culture

2.55 pm Scottish Government Business

followed by Parliamentary Bureau Motions

5.00 pm Decision Time

followed by Members' Business.—[Bruce Crawford.]

Motion agreed to.

Parliamentary Bureau Motion

16:59

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): The next item of business is consideration of a Parliamentary Bureau motion. I ask Bruce Crawford to move motion S3M-1845, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument.

Motion moved,

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Victim Notification Scheme (Scotland) Order 2008 be approved.—
[Bruce Crawford.]

The Presiding Officer: The question on the motion will be put at decision time.

Decision Time

17:00

The Presiding Officer (Alex Fergusson): There are five questions to be put as a result of today's business. The first question is, that amendment S3M-1838.2, in the name of Malcolm Chisholm, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1838, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the international framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)

McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

ABSTENTIONS

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)

Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 79, Against 0, Abstentions 46.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The second question is, that amendment S3M-1838.1, in the name of Ted Brocklebank, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1838, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the international framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

For

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)

Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

AGAINST

Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)

Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The third question is, that amendment S3M-1838.3, in the name of Iain Smith, which seeks to amend motion S3M-1838, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the international framework, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marlyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)
 McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)

McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Munro, John Farquhar (Ross, Skye and Inverness West) (LD)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)

Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)
 Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 77, Against 48, Abstentions 0.

Amendment agreed to.

The Presiding Officer: The fourth question is, that motion S3M-1838, in the name of Linda Fabiani, on the international framework, as amended, be agreed to. Are we agreed?

Members: No.

The Presiding Officer: There will be a division.

FOR

Aitken, Bill (Glasgow) (Con)
 Alexander, Ms Wendy (Paisley North) (Lab)
 Baillie, Jackie (Dumbarton) (Lab)
 Baker, Claire (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Baker, Richard (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Boyack, Sarah (Edinburgh Central) (Lab)
 Brankin, Rhona (Midlothian) (Lab)
 Brocklebank, Ted (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Brown, Gavin (Lothians) (Con)
 Brown, Robert (Glasgow) (LD)
 Brownlee, Derek (South of Scotland) (Con)
 Butler, Bill (Glasgow Anniesland) (Lab)
 Carlaw, Jackson (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Chisholm, Malcolm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab)
 Craigie, Cathie (Cumbernauld and Kilsyth) (Lab)
 Curran, Margaret (Glasgow Baillieston) (Lab)
 Eadie, Helen (Dunfermline East) (Lab)
 Ferguson, Patricia (Glasgow Maryhill) (Lab)
 Finnie, Ross (West of Scotland) (LD)
 Foulkes, George (Lothians) (Lab)
 Fraser, Murdo (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Gillon, Karen (Clydesdale) (Lab)
 Glen, Marilyn (North East Scotland) (Lab)
 Godman, Trish (West Renfrewshire) (Lab)
 Goldie, Annabel (West of Scotland) (Con)
 Gordon, Charlie (Glasgow Cathcart) (Lab)
 Grant, Rhoda (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Gray, Iain (East Lothian) (Lab)
 Henry, Hugh (Paisley South) (Lab)
 Hume, Jim (South of Scotland) (LD)
 Jamieson, Cathy (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab)
 Johnstone, Alex (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Kelly, James (Glasgow Rutherglen) (Lab)
 Kerr, Andy (East Kilbride) (Lab)
 Lamont, Johann (Glasgow Pollok) (Lab)
 Lamont, John (Roxburgh and Berwickshire) (Con)
 Macdonald, Lewis (Aberdeen Central) (Lab)
 Macintosh, Ken (Eastwood) (Lab)
 Martin, Paul (Glasgow Springburn) (Lab)
 McArthur, Liam (Orkney) (LD)
 McAveety, Mr Frank (Glasgow Shettleston) (Lab)
 McCabe, Tom (Hamilton South) (Lab)
 McConnell, Jack (Motherwell and Wishaw) (Lab)

McGrigor, Jamie (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 McInnes, Alison (North East Scotland) (LD)
 McLetchie, David (Edinburgh Pentlands) (Con)
 McMahon, Michael (Hamilton North and Bellshill) (Lab)
 McNeil, Duncan (Greenock and Inverclyde) (Lab)
 McNeill, Pauline (Glasgow Kelvin) (Lab)
 McNulty, Des (Clydebank and Milngavie) (Lab)
 Milne, Nanette (North East Scotland) (Con)
 Mitchell, Margaret (Central Scotland) (Con)
 Mulligan, Mary (Linlithgow) (Lab)
 Murray, Elaine (Dumfries) (Lab)
 O'Donnell, Hugh (Central Scotland) (LD)
 Oldfather, Irene (Cunninghame South) (Lab)
 Park, John (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Peacock, Peter (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Peattie, Cathy (Falkirk East) (Lab)
 Pringle, Mike (Edinburgh South) (LD)
 Purvis, Jeremy (Tweeddale, Ettrick and Lauderdale) (LD)
 Rumbles, Mike (West Aberdeenshire and Kincardine) (LD)
 Scanlon, Mary (Highlands and Islands) (Con)
 Scott, John (Ayr) (Con)
 Scott, Tavish (Shetland) (LD)
 Simpson, Dr Richard (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab)
 Smith, Elaine (Coatbridge and Chryston) (Lab)
 Smith, Elizabeth (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Con)
 Smith, Iain (North East Fife) (LD)
 Smith, Margaret (Edinburgh West) (LD)
 Stephen, Nicol (Aberdeen South) (LD)
 Stewart, David (Highlands and Islands) (Lab)
 Stone, Jamie (Caithness, Sutherland and Easter Ross) (LD)
 Tolson, Jim (Dunfermline West) (LD)
 Whitefield, Karen (Airdrie and Shotts) (Lab)
 Whitton, David (Strathkelvin and Bearsden) (Lab)

AGAINST

Adam, Brian (Aberdeen North) (SNP)
 Ahmad, Bashir (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Allan, Alasdair (Western Isles) (SNP)
 Brown, Keith (Ochil) (SNP)
 Campbell, Aileen (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Coffey, Willie (Kilmarnock and Loudoun) (SNP)
 Constance, Angela (Livingston) (SNP)
 Crawford, Bruce (Stirling) (SNP)
 Cunningham, Roseanna (Perth) (SNP)
 Don, Nigel (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Doris, Bob (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Fabiani, Linda (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 FitzPatrick, Joe (Dundee West) (SNP)
 Gibson, Kenneth (Cunninghame North) (SNP)
 Gibson, Rob (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Grahame, Christine (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Harper, Robin (Lothians) (Green)
 Harvie, Christopher (Mid Scotland and Fife) (SNP)
 Harvie, Patrick (Glasgow) (Green)
 Hepburn, Jamie (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 Hyslop, Fiona (Lothians) (SNP)
 Ingram, Adam (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Kidd, Bill (Glasgow) (SNP)
 MacAskill, Kenny (Edinburgh East and Musselburgh) (SNP)
 Marwick, Tricia (Central Fife) (SNP)
 Mather, Jim (Argyll and Bute) (SNP)
 Matheson, Michael (Falkirk West) (SNP)
 Maxwell, Stewart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 McKee, Ian (Lothians) (SNP)
 McKelvie, Christina (Central Scotland) (SNP)
 McMillan, Stuart (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Morgan, Alasdair (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Paterson, Gil (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Robison, Shona (Dundee East) (SNP)
 Russell, Michael (South of Scotland) (SNP)
 Salmond, Alex (Gordon) (SNP)

Somerville, Shirley-Anne (Lothians) (SNP)
 Stevenson, Stewart (Banff and Buchan) (SNP)
 Sturgeon, Nicola (Glasgow Govan) (SNP)
 Swinney, John (North Tayside) (SNP)
 Thompson, Dave (Highlands and Islands) (SNP)
 Watt, Maureen (North East Scotland) (SNP)
 Welsh, Andrew (Angus) (SNP)
 White, Sandra (Glasgow) (SNP)
 Wilson, Bill (West of Scotland) (SNP)
 Wilson, John (Central Scotland) (SNP)

ABSTENTIONS

MacDonald, Margo (Lothians) (Ind)
 Neil, Alex (Central Scotland) (SNP)

The Presiding Officer: The result of the division is: For 76, Against 46, Abstentions 2.

Motion, as amended, agreed to.

Resolved,

That the Parliament recognises the importance of ensuring that Scotland is competitive in an increasingly globalised society; agrees that creating the conditions for talented people to live, learn, visit, work and remain in Scotland is crucial to helping to deliver the goals of growing Scotland's population and economy in a sustainable way, and welcomes the Scottish Government's International Framework as part of the means to extend, focus and align the actions and policies of the government and public sector partners to these ends while stressing the need to "make full use of the UK resources at our disposal", including "the Foreign and Commonwealth Office network around the world to maximise business, cultural and educational opportunities for Scotland", and "engage more directly with the British Council in our priority markets with a view to maximising the opportunities to showcase Scotland's cultural and educational excellence abroad", as outlined in the International Framework document, but does not consider it in the best interests of Scotland for the Scottish Government to promote policies which do not command the support of the Parliament and, in particular, does not believe that the International Framework or any of the related documents or actions of the Scottish Government should contain any reference to Scottish independence, for which the minority Scottish Government has no mandate nor any authority from the Parliament to promote.

The Presiding Officer: The fifth question is, that motion S3M-1845, in the name of Bruce Crawford, on approval of a Scottish statutory instrument, be agreed to.

Motion agreed to.

That the Parliament agrees that the draft Victim Notification Scheme (Scotland) Order 2008 be approved.

Margo MacDonald (Lothians) (Ind): On a point of order, Presiding Officer. I hope that this is not too nit-picking a point. The minority Scottish Government has a mandate, as it has been elected by the people of Scotland. The mandate was endorsed when this Parliament agreed that it should form the Government. I am therefore concerned about—no, not concerned about, but certainly interested in—the competency of the resolution.

The Presiding Officer: I would be interested to know under what part of standing orders that point of order is raised.

Margo MacDonald: The election of the Scottish Parliament.

The Presiding Officer: I do not think that that is an issue for standing orders, so it is not a matter for me to determine. However, I am willing to have a conversation with you on the subject, Ms MacDonald, either later today or tomorrow.

That brings us to the end of decision time. We move on to members' business, so I ask members who are leaving the chamber to do so quietly.

Alternative and Augmentative Communication

The Deputy Presiding Officer (Alasdair Morgan): Order. Members should not cross the well of the chamber.

The final item of business is a members' business debate on motion S3M-1660, in the name of Nanette Milne, on alternative and augmentative communication. The debate will be concluded without any question being put.

Motion debated,

That the Parliament expresses concern following the findings by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Capability Scotland and Augmentative Communication in Practice whose recent survey of alternative and augmentative communication (AAC) equipment and speech and language therapy support provision in Scotland revealed that eight out of 15 NHS boards, including NHS Grampian, are providing a poor service; notes that only 16% of potential beneficiaries are accessing specialist AAC services in Scotland and that AAC provision is a postcode, age, advocacy and impairment lottery, and considers that an AAC strategy for Scotland should be developed and implemented to provide for a national standard of specialist speech and language therapy provision.

17:07

Nanette Milne (North East Scotland) (Con): The inability to communicate leads to perhaps one of the most desperate feelings of frustration that a human being can have. Sadly, in 21st century Scotland, a significant number of our fellow citizens daily experience such desperation and frustration.

The device that I have just used to open my speech is a modern and sophisticated talking machine. It is one of a range of alternative and augmentative communication aids that includes simple picture boards and sign and even personal body languages. The aids can be used either to augment speech or as an alternative to speech and writing for people who have difficulties with communication.

While I used the machine to highlight the debate, I had hoped that there would be some people in the public gallery for whom AAC is the difference between complete isolation and the ability to make meaningful contact with their families, friends and the outside world. Unfortunately, those people could not make it this evening, but I am delighted that a number of specialist speech and language therapists have come to hear the debate. I know that all members in the chamber will welcome their presence.

Earlier today, I was privileged to meet several younger AAC users from Crossford primary

school, who came along to show that difficulties with communication can affect all age groups.

I was very happy to lodge the motion on behalf of the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. In partnership with Capability Scotland and the augmentative communication in practice group, the RCSLT has been leading a campaign called give us our right to communicate. I am grateful to the 43 MSPs who supported the motion.

There are an estimated 2,500 potential AAC users in Scotland. They range from pre-school children to elderly people, and they suffer from a wide variety of conditions, such as learning difficulties, cerebral palsy, autism, multiple sclerosis, motor neurone disease, Parkinson's disease, stroke, Alzheimer's disease or head injury or are post-laryngectomy because of head or neck cancers. For all those people, AAC can make a huge difference to their quality of life, and allow them to express themselves, to have more control over their lives and to take part in activities at school and in their communities.

For AAC to work effectively, its users need two things—appropriate communication aids, and specialist and on-going speech and language therapy. The communication aids must match the user's communication support needs, which can change over time—for instance, as a child grows up or as a degenerative condition such as motor neurone disease gets worse.

With a limited number of potential users, the cost of equipment is not massive in public sector terms. Low-technology aids such as picture boards cost only the time that the therapist spends designing and making them, and the high-technology talking aids cost from £100 up to around £6,000 for the one that I have here, plus the on-going cost of insurance and maintenance.

On top of that, specialist speech and language therapists are required to assess communication needs, to identify the best aid for the individual, to design and produce simple aids, and to programme the high-tech aids with the language that the user needs to cope with education, work and social situations. Of course, users and the carers, teachers, employers and others who are involved in their lives need support to get the most benefit out of the equipment.

Unfortunately, at present, only around one person in six who could benefit from alternative and augmentative communication aids can access specialist AAC services in Scotland. Even when an aid is provided, there is often an unacceptably long wait between assessment and provision. Health boards throughout Scotland have recently had their AAC services rated according to funding procedures; budgets to loan, purchase, insure and

maintain communication aids; the availability of dedicated local speech and language therapy; and contracts with specialist AAC centres. Eight out of the 15 health boards—including NHS Tayside and NHS Grampian, the two in my region—have been found wanting and are rated as poor. In such areas, people can wait months or years for assessment and the aid and support that they require. In other areas, there is no wait at all between assessment and provision. Once again, Scotland has a postcode lottery of provision.

Services for children tend to be better than those for adults, but provision can fall short when the children move on from school and lose funding from the education budget. Funding tends to be erratic: sometimes it comes from the education authority, sometimes from the national health service and sometimes from a combination of both. Budgets are small, and money for the purchase of new aids often comes from ad hoc, competitive streams such as end-of-year money at the end of the financial year, so a patient is more likely to get their aid if their need is identified in January rather than September. Provision also varies according to disability and advocacy, with charities and a diverse range of statutory providers giving different degrees of support, hence the campaign to develop and implement a Scotland-wide AAC strategy to achieve a national standard of specialist provision.

The right to communicate is an equal opportunities issue; it is a recognised human right. That point has been stressed vehemently by the Commissioner for Children and Young People in Scotland, Kathleen Marshall, who has been highly supportive of the efforts that are being made to improve AAC provision throughout Scotland.

I am hopeful that the campaign will bear fruit, because the Scottish National Party Government has accepted the recommendation of the disability working group—which the previous Executive set up—that there is a need for adequate support and equipment to access education. That is backed up by the tenor of some of the comments in "Better Health, Better Care". Also, following a recent report by the Scottish Executive social research unit on communication support needs and its recommendations for further research into the problems that people with such needs, including AAC users, face, the Government said that it hoped to respond this spring with plans to address the issues that have been raised.

I hope that the debate has come at an opportune time. The campaigners, including a young AAC user from Dumfries and Galloway, are looking forward to their meeting with the minister to discuss AAC provision next week. I congratulate all the people who have worked hard to raise the profile of AAC, which is highly important for a

small but significant number of our fellow citizens. I look forward to the minister's response, which I hope will be sympathetic.

17:14

Trish Godman (West Renfrewshire) (Lab): I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate.

How awful it must be for someone to know that they could communicate with others but that the means to do so is not available to them. Some people use AAC, as Nanette Milne has explained, to communicate; others use it to help them understand what is being said. A few weeks ago, I had a members' business debate about the lack of proper wheelchair provision. Having read up on the subject for this debate, I feel as if I have been flipped back a couple of months, as I am finding the same sorts of problem. We have the knowledge, and we could provide what is necessary, but we do not. Why not? As with the debate on wheelchair users, it seems that the louder people shout and harass, the better chance they have of success. The give us our right to communicate campaign states:

"Communication ... allows us to interact socially, to learn, to develop, to have control in our own lives and to express our needs, hopes and fears for the future."

As Nanette Milne has said, AAC is used by many people, including people who were born with learning difficulties and older people who have had a stroke or brain injury. Some people need to use it for a short time; others need it for all of their lives. Why should that provision be a postcode, age, advocacy or impairment lottery? Why are eight out of 15 health boards classed as poor in their provision? Is it because the AAC budget line is easy to cut?

Financial considerations should not be the key issue. Providing the right equipment and adaptations needs to be viewed in the context of social justice and social inclusion. The equipment can have a significant impact on people's lives and on those of their carers. The right equipment can mean the possibility of employment, education, and social and recreational opportunities. The provision of equipment and adaptations addresses inequality issues. Equality of opportunity means that everyone should have the possibility to increase their potential and to have more control over their lives. To have those opportunities, people need to be able to communicate.

What of the process that is required to access communication devices? I know from the experience of constituents that it can be difficult, but it should be easy: people should be able to get local information, advice and support. There should be a joined-up approach: a single

assessment, the provision of quality products—I referred to that in the wheelchair debate—and an holistic approach to the person, their environment, their care needs and their carers' needs.

The European convention on human rights covers fundamental rights, including the prohibition of degrading treatment. As I said, we have the knowledge, but we are not providing the equipment that is needed. That is degrading treatment that stops young people and older people from communicating with the people around them.

Corseford school is in my constituency, and I visited it earlier this year. I sat in a class where the pupils were making up satchels to send to Africa. They were putting in pencils, pens and notepaper. They were delighted to tell me, through their AAC systems, that they were sending them to kids in schools in Africa who did not have the same opportunities that they did. Some children used the devices like Nanette Milne did, with their hands and fingers; others used them with the side of their head. The pupils were absolutely delighted that they were able to send the satchels to Africa, because they knew that the children there were not getting the same opportunities for social interaction and education that they were getting as a result of being able to communicate.

I will finish by quoting from a letter that I received from Steven Sweeney, who is a constituent of mine:

"I have a DynaVox. If people don't understand my gestures then it helps me to communicate with them. I can join in with assemblies and plays. I was the 'sound guy' for our school musical, 'Beauty and the Beast'. I can use it for environmental control so I can open doors and special windows and work my DVD player and TV. The most important thing is that I can speak. All people who need this help should get it, I think."

I think so too, Steven. I hope that the eight health boards that were rated as poor in their provision of communication systems—they include Greater Glasgow and Clyde NHS Board—are listening, and that they think so, too. The ball is in their court, and in the minister's.

17:19

Kenneth Gibson (Cunninghame North) (SNP): I add my congratulations to Nanette Milne not only on securing the debate but on her thought-provoking opening speech.

I am pleased that the health board that covers most of my constituency—Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board—is rated as very good. I hope that many lessons can be learned from its work.

The augmentative and alternative communication resource provides an area-wide service to the communication-impaired population

of Ayrshire and Arran who require to be assessed for and use high-tech methods of augmentative or alternative communication. The resource is staffed by only 0.5 of a whole-time equivalent speech and language therapist. That individual—or half an individual—is responsible for leading that specialist service throughout the entire health board area. Nevertheless, training is provided and there is support for clients, carers, speech and language therapists, and others in all aspects of AAC systems.

Interestingly, AAC devices are not always expensive. The cost ranges from around £100 to, in some cases, in excess of £6,000. For a relatively limited amount, a significant number of people can be helped. As we have heard, only about 2,500 people in Scotland really require AAC devices.

In the past year, there have been 41 loans of AAC equipment to people in Ayrshire and Arran. The equipment has been provided to people ranging from pre-school children to the elderly, and whose diagnoses include, among many others, cancer, learning difficulties, head injuries and cerebral palsy. The service maintains a large bank of AAC equipment that is provided on loan to individuals during the assessment period. As a result, there is little waiting time for adults or children. Over the years, a catalogue of frequently used equipment has been built up.

Once an appropriate voice output device has been identified for an individual, the equipment is provided on a long-term loan basis. NHS Ayrshire and Arran is responsible for the maintenance costs for the equipment, which is carefully tracked and well maintained.

There is an opportunity for other health boards to learn from the health boards that are doing well. Best practice is extremely important. I hope that Ayrshire and Arran NHS Board will be one of the boards from which others learn.

Of course, that does not mean that everything in the garden is rosy in Ayrshire and Arran. At present, the budget for AAC systems in the area is small and, as we know, there are always competing priorities. Much of the budget is taken up with renewing warranties for devices and paying for repairs. Additions to the loan bank are often made by making one-off requests for equipment to a range of committees and bidding for money at the end of the financial year.

Accommodation for delivering the service is also an issue. Currently, the AAC resource is in an area of Ayrshire Central hospital in which it is not suitable to see clients. We have already heard that some people would have liked to come to the debate but were unable to do so. The situation is the same for people who try to get assessed. In

Ayrshire Central hospital, the AAC resource is on the first floor, with no lift access. The area is cramped and there is no room in which to meet clients, even if they could get to the office. That is unacceptable, given the needs of many people who use the service.

Given that my assistant James Stewart suffers from severe stammering, I should mention that for people who suffer from stammering, which is another communication problem, there is a piece of technology called SpeechEasy, which is expensive. James has looked into it and advises me that the technology is available only in private clinics and costs up to £5,000. That would not help him, but it would help a number of other people who have severe stammering problems. We need to allow people who suffer from stammering to communicate more, fluently and with confidence, so that they can play their full role in society.

I thank Nanette Milne for her excellent introduction and for securing this important debate.

17:23

Cathy Jamieson (Carrick, Cumnock and Doon Valley) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate and on the innovative way in which she commenced the debate, which was a first in the Parliament and which brought home to us all just how important the issue is. As politicians, we are so used to being able to say our piece and have people hear us—regardless of whether they take account of everything that we say—that it takes something such as what Nanette Milne did to bring home just how important the subject is and how important it is to harness the use of technology to give people who would otherwise have no voice a way of expressing themselves and communicating.

Nanette Milne told us about the recent survey carried out by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. The survey shows the disparity in service provision across Scotland, which was mentioned by Kenny Gibson and Trish Godman.

It is good news that some health boards have an overall rating that is perhaps good, but it is clearly a cause for concern that a number of health boards provide a disappointing level of service. NHS Ayrshire and Arran, in my own area, came out of the survey with one of the most positive overall ratings. However, although I welcome the very good practice that Kenny Gibson highlighted, even in that health board area there is still evidence of a disparity in the services available to people across Ayrshire. For example, the education contract with the communication aids for language and learning centre is available only in

East Ayrshire. I will pursue that issue with the health board, as I am sure will other members.

The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Capability Scotland and augmentative communication in practice are campaigning on two key areas for action. First, they want a national strategy that is based on need and minimum standards of service. They also want to ensure that the strategy covers closer co-ordination of health services with local education authorities and social work services and any other partners that need to be involved to deliver the high standards of service that everyone needs. Secondly, they want increased provision of specialist speech and language therapy equipment. We have heard about how important that aim is in ending the postcode lottery of access to specialist communications equipment. I am sure that we will hear more about that.

I cannot put the case any more eloquently than a young constituent of mine did. Daniel Montgomery, from Coynton in South Ayrshire, wrote to me when the motion was lodged. He told me, in his own words, what his communication aid meant to him and the difference that it made at school. I promised Daniel that I would read out his letter when the motion was debated. He states:

"I've had my Dynavox for 4 years and it really helps me speak to people. I use it in class for all my subjects and for chatting around school. I've also done presentations to important visitors. I enjoy telling my news and showing people my photos and playing the MP3 player. I really like Take That!

I love having my Dynavox and have had lots of practice with my Speech Therapist to learn to use it for all these things. I think people who need them should get them—they're cool."

I might not agree with him about Take That, and I am not sure that I would use the phrase "they're cool", but that is how Daniel sees his aid. It has been very important to him, to the other young people with whom he communicates and to the adults who work with him. I hope that today we will get a positive response from the minister as we take the matter forward.

17:28

Robert Brown (Glasgow) (LD): This is a timely debate and I join other members in congratulating Nanette Milne on securing it. With her medical background she is well placed to put the case for the various groups of people with such communication difficulties. I have no such expertise but, like other members, I have had the opportunity over the years, as a member of the Scottish Parliament and previously, to meet individuals and families with such problems in their schools or homes.

Such a problem does not usually come alone; it is often one of a number of difficulties, disabilities or challenges. Like others, I can imagine few things more frustrating than being unable to communicate with other people, including our parents and carers, peer group and the miscellany of people whom we meet daily and with whom we normally take communication for granted. That is the central point. As Trish Godman said, we should view the issue not from a medical perspective but from a social perspective. People with communication difficulties need to be put, as far as possible, in the same position as the rest of us so that they can be facilitated, in this age of marvellous modern communications—devices such as the one that Nanette Milne demonstrated are marvellous modern forms of communication—to live lives that are as normal as possible and as full of opportunity as they can be.

The picture revealed in the survey is tragic. Indeed, it is a tragedy that is multiplied by 2,100, given the estimated 2,100 individuals who were not accessing specialist AAC services in Scotland when the 2004 survey was conducted. Whatever the reasons, explanations, policies, strategies or financial pressures, the situation is not satisfactory and I hope that when the minister replies she can be specific about what can be done.

In the two areas in which I have a constituency interest, Greater Glasgow and Lanarkshire, it is disturbing that, as Trish Godman said, the health boards are marked as being poor. The Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists tells me that the main problem is funding for communication aids and support in using the aids. In addition, however, there is no pan-Glasgow specific AAC or specialist speech and language therapy service.

Talking aids can be expensive, as we heard earlier. However, when we are told that some children have their aid equipment removed when they go home at night or when they leave school and become someone else's responsibility, we can be pretty sure that the challenges are organisational and systemic as well as financial. Transition points are always an issue—I know that from my previous experience in the Education Department—and there is often a significant disjunction when the young people about whom we are talking leave school, in terms of the support that they get.

A situation has been brought to light that is not tolerable in modern Scotland, and I hope that the survey and today's debate can act as a wake-up call for all of us with any influence in these areas.

17:30

Dr Richard Simpson (Mid Scotland and Fife) (Lab): I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing

the debate and on finding a graphic way of highlighting the function of communication aids.

In the first session of the Scottish Parliament, we passed the Adults with Incapacity (Scotland) Act 2000, which was a landmark bill. It was heralded in Europe—although not in Scotland, because, at the time, there was a huge debate about irrelevant issues—as a massive advance. Debates on the bill concentrated quite considerably on the question of communication, and dealt with the fact that people who cannot communicate are often perceived as being unintelligent or unable to formulate thoughts. That is simply not the case. The problem of stigma has not been referred to much in today's debate, but there is a need for a campaign—like those that are designed to deal with stigma in other areas—that helps people to understand that people who use communication aids are often very intelligent and are perfectly able to communicate, if they are given the tools to do so.

The question of price really should not enter the issue. Others have talked about that issue, so I will not go into it. We hear about the postcode lottery in relation to many services—the best service is good, and the worst service is poor, and whether someone gets the service that they need depends on where they live. Undoubtedly, that needs to be addressed. Trish Godman was right when she said that, in this debate, one gets a sense of déjà vu, as the wheelchair debate dealt with a similar situation.

Over the years, I—like, I am sure, Nanette Milne—had considerable experience of patients with communication difficulties. The difference that the application of technology made over the 40-odd years that I was in practice is absolutely enormous. Forty years ago, it could not be said that we had the means to help people communicate. Now that we have the means, we must have the will to deliver aid to everybody who needs that help. If we do not, we will allow children to grow up without the ability to meet their aspirations because of a lack of relatively inexpensive equipment, because of a lack of training on the equipment, or because they have the wrong equipment. We need a skilled and specialised service if we are to ensure that the right equipment is delivered and the proper training is provided.

We have another good news story in Scotland. Our 30-day-and-beyond stroke survival rate has increased substantially, and will continue to increase due to the specialist stroke and rehabilitation services that we have put in place. However, people who have suffered from a stroke are in a situation in which their ability to manipulate their environment and communicate can be affected. That loss of control and

independence can have a devastating psychological effect. If that devastation can be prevented by the provision of a piece of appropriate equipment, we owe it to those individuals to ensure that they have access to such equipment at the appropriate time.

The challenge to the Government is to update the survey of need; establish standards in order to eliminate the postcode lottery; provide entitlement to a maximum waiting time, because people in these circumstances cannot and should not be made to wait; and provide funding for the service that will end the charitable lottery on which people in some areas are forced to depend, as well as the lottery that arises as a result of the fact that some conditions are eligible for charitable support and some are not. We need a clear strategy and additional funding in order to solve the problem.

17:35

Mary Scanlon (Highlands and Islands) (Con):

I apologise for having to leave before the minister sums up; I will read the *Official Report*. I congratulate my colleague Nanette Milne on securing the debate and on her interest over many years in the issue. Her use of the DynaVox was moving and was probably the best way to hit home on what we are talking about.

As Cathy Jamieson said, there is no doubt that we all take for granted the ability to speak. A document that the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists provided contained touching quotations from AAC system users. A young child who had been given the ability to engage with classmates said:

"I can take part in school activities and discussions".

How simple is that? A 46-year-old said:

"My communication aid gives me a voice."

Those statements are simple, but they hit home.

It is unfortunate that such comments can come from only 16 per cent of potential AAC system users. As Nanette Milne and others said, we have a postcode lottery. The briefing paper surveys current service provision. The overall rating of NHS Highland's service is good. It has a funding procedure in place and a defined budget for AAC services. That is wonderful. However, the service in the neighbouring Western Isles has an overall rating of poor—that area has no funding procedure in place and no defined budget for AAC services. Constituents who live in those areas receive a vastly different service and experience a different quality of life as a result.

As Nanette Milne said, an AAC strategy for Scotland would be a positive way forward to ensure consistency and to set minimum standards for the service. The strategy could cover pooling of

budgets from local authority education and social work departments and health services. That would not only maximise resources and streamline delivery but prevent potential users from being denied an AAC system because, for example, as they are close to the school-leaving age, the education budget will not give them funding.

Mobility issues can entitle people to a wheelchair, as Trish Godman said, or to a walking stick, but people have no such entitlement to assistance for communication problems. As Richard Simpson said, it is tragic that although we have the technology to aid communication, as we have seen, only 16 per cent of those who could benefit do so.

We must move away from the current situation in which the AAC provision that a person receives is determined by the health board area in which they live or by other factors, such as their age, their medical problem or their ability to pay, which Kenny Gibson mentioned. In some areas, users must fund their communication aids, whereas other users choose to do that because of the time that statutory agencies take to make decisions. That situation must not continue.

I hope that Nanette Milne's voice will be listened to and I commend her for raising the issue in the Parliament and for all her hard work to ensure that people without a voice are heard.

17:39

Marlyn Glen (North East Scotland) (Lab): I, too, congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate and on her groundbreaking use of a communication aid in the chamber. Not all communication aids are as high-tech as the DynaVox. Widespread use is made of picture boards, for example. I am still undecided about whether it might be preferable for some of our colleagues—present company excepted, of course—to use such aids to enliven and augment their speeches. Broadcasting and official report staff might also appreciate such innovations more often.

Today, I was delighted to join other MSPs in meeting pupils from Crossford primary school, some of whom are lucky enough to use such special communication aids. As Nanette Milne said, the pupils were also joined by Scotland's Commissioner for Children and Young People, Kathleen Marshall, who is a powerful advocate of fair services for children. She talked enthusiastically about the right of every child to have a voice—their own voice.

As a member of the Equal Opportunities Committee, I believe that everyone should have the opportunity to lead as full a life as possible. However, that means different things to different

people. The promotion of equal opportunities is a founding principle of our Parliament, and we are rightly proud of the progress that has been made across all the equality strands in Scotland. However, we should consider the statistics that have been provided by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. It seems to me from those figures that equality of opportunities must seem an empty-sounding concept. None of us can accept that meeting the needs of only 16 per cent of people is remotely adequate. I am therefore pleased to join the cross-party call for a framework and a national standard of specialist speech and language therapy provision. Wherever people live in Scotland, they need to have access to adequate, properly funded and timely provision.

I welcome the minister's intention to meet the campaign group, but I also urge that action be taken Scotland-wide to end the postcode lottery of services. Services should not depend merely on where a person happens to live or on how old they are. Young people are assessed at school and, under the Education (Additional Support for Learning) (Scotland) Act 2004, they ought to have a co-ordinated support plan that includes provision for communication. That plan should be in place for pupils in schools, but I worry that, with the national priorities action fund being rolled up in the general settlement, there will be no specific money for additional support for learning. I hope that the minister will address that point in summing up.

I remember being delighted as a support for learning teacher by the input of a speech and language therapist who was engaged for a pupil with particular communication difficulties. The therapist made a wonderful difference not only for that pupil but for the whole peer group that was included in the group work. Indeed, the therapist's input was motivational for teachers and classroom assistants alike.

We need to renew the focus on basic skills for all children, including communication, in order to provide the building-blocks to assist every child to get the best start in their education. I am pleased that the Labour Party's consultation on children regards that as a key principle.

It is probable that all of us have direct knowledge of older people who have had communication difficulties following a stroke or because of a debilitating disease. Their needs must also be met and not dismissed on the ground of age.

We should not rely solely on charitable funding, welcome though it is. Groups such as the Parkinson's Disease Society provide huge support for sufferers and their carers, but we are planning for a great change in the demographics of Scotland. That is another aspect that must be

addressed, and I look forward to what the minister says about that.

People have the right to communicate and the right to a voice—their own voice—wherever they live and whatever their age. Members must join together to ensure that we are strong advocates of their cause.

The Deputy Presiding Officer: I am minded to accept a motion without notice to extend the debate for 10 minutes in order to complete our business.

Motion moved,

That, under Rule 8.14.3, the debate be extended until 5.53pm.—[*Nanette Milne.*]

Motion agreed to.

17:43

Malcolm Chisholm (Edinburgh North and Leith) (Lab): I congratulate Nanette Milne on securing the debate and on her campaigning work on alternative and augmentative communication over a period of years. I also congratulate and welcome to the gallery members of the alternative and augmentative communication campaign. I commend their central demand for a strategy that is based on need; that sets out minimum standards of service; that delivers better-quality and equitable provision throughout Scotland; and that leads to the co-ordination or pooling of local education, social work and health budgets. I was pleased to see from the survey that was carried out that Lothian NHS Board—which is the board that covers my area—is doing better than some other boards in that regard. However, it is clear that we cannot regard as satisfactory a situation in which eight NHS boards are judged to provide poor services.

Of course, as the suggestion to pool resources indicates, alternative and augmentative communication is not just a health matter. It affects a wide range of services, including education, social care, justice and other services.

I was pleased to commission research on communication support needs in 2006 when I was the Minister for Communities. The first part of that research, entitled “Communication Support Needs: A Review of the Literature”, was published in 2007. The research found, among other things, that people with communication support needs are more likely to experience negative social interactions in education, health care, criminal justice and other services. It also found that people with communication support needs have difficulty in accessing the information that is required to utilise services. A key recommendation was that there should be further research, central to which was the recommendation that research

should be carried out that engaged directly with people with communication support needs. That was the most important of several recommendations that the report made.

In January, I asked a parliamentary question about the report. I was told:

“The Scottish Government very much welcomes the findings of the research report ... The review concluded with recommendations for three further research studies and we are considering the options carefully. We hope to respond in the spring with our plans for addressing the issues raised.”—[*Official Report, Written Answers*, 31 January 2008; S3W-8595.]

As we can all see the sun shining into the chamber, we know that spring has now passed. I therefore look forward to the minister’s response.

17:46

The Minister for Public Health (Shona Robison): I thank Nanette Milne for securing this important debate and for making a strong point at the start of her speech. I also thank her for giving me the opportunity to comment on the concerns of service users and alternative and augmentative communication professionals about the current provision of AAC services, which impinge on social and education services as well as health services.

I am grateful for being allowed access to the findings of the survey that was undertaken by the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists, Capability Scotland and augmentative communication in practice. I welcome the speech and language therapists who are in the public gallery tonight. The survey indicates good practice in Lothian, Fife, Highland and Ayrshire and Arran, as Kenny Gibson noted. I would welcome other NHS boards reaching similar levels of good practice in collaboration with local authorities. It is for NHS boards, working together with local authority services, to ensure that alternative and augmentative communication aids are available that best meet the needs of their local communities. That also requires appropriately trained staff who are able to provide the service to all those who need that level of support.

The Scottish Government is committed to equality of opportunity for all, and our work on disability equality is inclusive of all conditions and impairments. We are currently funding the communication forum Scotland to deliver a project that aims to improve and support civic participation among people with communication support needs in Scotland. A key product of the project is a toolkit that provides practical advice, guidance and resources to policy makers at all levels of government and across all public and other sector agencies, supporting effective engagement with people with communication support needs in

Scotland. The toolkit was formally launched yesterday at a communication forum Scotland event, "Talk for Scotland", and was centrally funded from the £60,000 that was given by the Government to the civic partnership network.

Although I acknowledge that there may be room for improvement, I will outline some examples of the good work that is currently being delivered in NHS Scotland. NHS Scotland provides a range of AAC services, including the communication aids for language and learning centre, which is known as the CALL centre. The CALL centre is a national service that was set up for children and which is funded centrally by the education and training branch of the Scottish Government. NHS Scotland also provides the Scottish centre of technology for the communication impaired, which is based in the Southern general hospital in Glasgow and works to an outreach model.

With the exception of NHS Fife, NHS Lothian, NHS Orkney and NHS Shetland, NHS boards contribute to the Glasgow centre and the boards contract into the services that are provided from Glasgow. NHS Orkney and NHS Shetland have contracts for children with the CALL centre. NHS Lothian and NHS Fife both have successful integrated models of service delivery in place. NHS Lothian has a service for all ages that is jointly funded by health, education and social care services. It provides joint assessment and the loan of communication aids to service users, sourcing equipment for permanent use when required. The Fife assessment centre for communication through technology has AAC policies for all schools in the area and the service is jointly funded by health, education and social care services. In Grampian, the city of Aberdeen has a service that supports pupils in schools, which is funded by the local authority's education department. That includes part-time speech therapy provision for children who require communication aids. In Ayrshire and Arran, speech therapy services are provided by NHS Scotland to cover AAC needs. There is a lot of good practice out there, but we need that good practice to be provided elsewhere.

Trish Godman: I know that the Scottish Government no longer ring fences local authority funding, but what is its position on ring fencing health board funding? Given that this situation seems to be exactly the same as the one that we discussed a few weeks ago, in that money is not being made available, will the Government consider ring fencing money for AAC provision?

Shona Robison: I will come to potential solutions in a moment.

In 2004, the previous Administration launched the sensory impairment action plan, which was targeted primarily at local authorities and contained recommendations on the community

care needs of adults with a sensory impairment. The action plan was produced in consultation with voluntary organisations. Under the action plan, there has been joint working between voluntary organisations that represent those with a sensory impairment and the Scottish Government. I want that partnership working to continue, with the aim of further improving services to this client group.

In April last year, guidance was issued to Scottish local authorities to raise awareness of the services available and to provide for a more person-centred approach. Provision was made for the need to assess and meet any sensory impairment requirements, including any particular communication requirements. Communication training for front-line community care staff is included in the action plan, and training material has been developed and piloted.

The work of the sensory impairment action plan steering group will shortly come to an end, but members of the group and Scottish Government officials will continue to work together to help to deliver services to those who have a sensory impairment.

In "Better Health, Better Care", the Scottish Government committed itself to providing more responsive and better-quality care for people with disabilities, with a particular focus on improving access, communication and respect for individuals. Fair for all—disability has also published national guidance on improving access and removing the barriers that face people who access NHS services.

The Scottish Government supports the principle of independent living and wants to see action to deliver that. On that point, I can advise that we will shortly announce our plans to take that work forward. In doing so, we will of course work closely with disabled people and their representative organisations.

On where we go from here, I have a meeting next week—as Nanette Milne mentioned—with the Royal College of Speech and Language Therapists. In advance of that meeting, I will look at the DVD outlining the royal college's concerns, some of which are also contained in the briefing. At that meeting, I want to set out a course of action on how we can begin to address some of the shortcomings. In my discussions with the royal college, I intend to include many of the suggestions that have been made in the course of this evening's debate. I assure members that we will look at how we take forward the many important issues that have been raised this evening. I will be happy to give Parliament an update on progress in due course.

Meeting closed at 17:53.

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